

**UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF GIFTED
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO CHOSE TO ATTEND A NEW
SCHOOL-WITHIN-A-SCHOOL GIFTED MAGNET PROGRAM
LOCATED ON A HIGHLY AT-RISK CAMPUS**

A Dissertation

by

ANN ELIZABETH AKIN BARNES

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2010

Major Subject: Educational Psychology

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Michael Ash Joyce Juntune
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ABSTRACT

Understanding the Lived Experience of Gifted Middle School Students Who Chose to
Attend a New School-Within-a-School Gifted Magnet Program Located on a Highly
At-Risk Campus. (December 2010)

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In 2008, Bryan ISD decided to establish a magnet program for gifted middle school students. The program followed the school-within-a-school model and was housed in an existing middle school situated in an area of the district where a high percentage of the student population came from low socio-economic homes. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain an understanding of the experience a gifted student goes through in choosing to attend a new gifted magnet program housed in a school away from their home campus. It examines how students arrived at their decision by taking an in-depth look at their thoughts and decision-making processes, the outside influences on their decision, and their expectations of the program.

A qualitative case study research method guided this study. The subjects were middle school students in grades 6-8, who were selected for participation based on random sampling for maximum variation. Six students were selected for participation,

of which, two were from each of the three grade levels, four were male, two were female, one was African-American, two were Hispanic, and three were Caucasian.

Participant interview responses were compared to responses from the entrance applications of the other 123 magnet students at INQUIRE. The responses of the two different groups of students mirrored each other. The results of the study indicated three emergent themes: 1) the desire for challenge overruled the comfort of the familiar, 2) the need to be surrounded by other students who love learning, and 3) the focus was on the future and not the present.

The findings of this study indicate that gifted students chose to attend the new magnet program for the academic challenge and the opportunity to learn alongside other gifted students. They had high expectations of what this program would be able to provide them as they strove to reach their goals. The participation of their friends in the new program was not a factor in their decision to attend.

INQUIRE Academy was designed to offer something unusual in public education – the opportunity to cluster gifted students together, to provide them the opportunity to be intellectually stimulated and challenged by working with peers of the same ability level, to offer multi-age classes, and to offer acceleration based upon student need. For the students in this study, INQUIRE Academy accomplished these goals.

DEDICATION

To my family -
who lovingly supported me throughout this lengthy process
of spiritual, personal, and professional growth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been a remarkable experience to be involved in the development of the INQUIRE Academy in Bryan, Texas, and to watch the impact that is occurring in students' lives due to their participation in this unique and rare program. By being on the cutting edge of innovation in gifted education, the possibilities for positively impacting numerous student lives will multiply exponentially as word of this program spreads across the state, and other districts visit to learn how to develop similar programs. Thus, beginning a ripple effect, which can change the face of gifted education forever. I am blessed and humbled to be a part in this process.

There are several people I wish to thank for assisting me along this educational journey. First, I wish to thank Dr. Joyce Juntune, my co-chair and mentor, for your support and guidance over the past eight years. You were always available to lend support, answer questions, and provide guidance during the development of INQUIRE Academy and throughout my doctoral program. I would not have survived without you walking every step beside me and making the journey so painless. I want to thank Dr. Ben Welch for your support, encouragement, and prayers since the early days of Bowen Elementary. Your positive words energized me to continue toward my goal, whenever I considered giving up. Thank you, Linda Madden, for your belief that I was the right person to serve BISD as the GT Coordinator and to tackle the job of planning and opening INQUIRE. Your friendship over the past 24 years has been a blessing! To Karla Cacho-Negrete, my sister in Christ, I am thankful for your love, friendship, and

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NOMENCLATURE

BCHS	Bryan Collegiate High School
BCIS	Business Computing Integrated Systems
BHS	Bryan High School
BISD	Bryan Independent School District
DMS	Davila Middle School
FLEX	Flexible High School Program
GT	Gifted and Talented
IB	International Baccalaureate
JLMS	Jane Long Middle School
MYP	Middle Years Programme
RHS	Rudder High School
RMS	Rayburn Middle School
SFAMS	Stephen F. Austin Middle School
SOI	Structure of the Intellect
TFC	Task Force Committee

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Bryan Independent School District (BISD), located in central Texas, has a student population of 14,362 students who attend fifteen elementary schools, four middle schools, and four high schools. Two of the four high schools are specifically designed to target exclusive student populations. Bryan Collegiate High School (BCHS) is an early college high school designed to target first generation college attendees. Students attending BCHS can earn up to sixty college credits through dual enrollment with Blinn College by the end of their senior year at no cost to the families. The Flexible High School Program (FLEX) is designed to address the needs of at-risk students. Students who have dropped out of school or who work full-time to help support their families are recruited to return to school to complete their degree. The school is open between 10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. and students work with school staff to determine their hours of attendance and to develop a timeline for the completion of their courses. At the middle school level, there are two academies designed to offer students educational options based on their interests. The Odyssey Academy (Odyssey) was placed at Stephen F. Austin Middle School (SFAMS) for students interested in math, science, and technology. This program was designed to be an enrichment model with a focus on

This dissertation follows the style of *Gifted Child Quarterly*.

space exploration to Mars. Odyssey is open to any interested student who wishes to apply; however, Odyssey staff uses a screening process to select high performing students. The INQUIRE Academy (INQUIRE) was placed at Jane Long Middle School (JLMS) for students who had been identified as gifted or high achieving. The only entry requirement to INQUIRE is prior identification as gifted or high achieving by district criteria.

BISD identifies students as gifted or high achieving based upon a compilation of evidence and serves ten percent of its student population. Such items include student work samples, teacher/parent/peer/student nominations, and non-verbal/verbal cognitive ability test scores. BISD recognizes that both gifted and high achieving students have a need for differentiated services in the classroom, and currently provides services for those students through clustering and inclusion in the regular classroom. Instruction is differentiated by the classroom teacher and is based upon student need. District teachers are provided the state required Level I training, which consists of thirty hours of training on the nature and needs of gifted students, the social and emotional needs of the gifted, identification and assessment of the gifted, and differentiation strategies. Teachers are also provided with the state required annual Level II six hours of update training on a variety of gifted issues. At the elementary level, gifted and high achieving students are clustered into classrooms with students of all other ability levels. Teachers are expected to provide services for the gifted and high achieving students in their class, as well as the students who are barely able to pass the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test (TAKS)*. At the secondary level, gifted and high achieving students receive services

through *Pre-Advanced Placement* courses at grades 6-10 and *Advanced Placement*, Dual Credit, or *International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme* courses at grades 11-12. All of these classes are designed to provide curriculum at higher levels of rigor when compared to regular classrooms.

The INQUIRE Academy (INQUIRE) was created as a result of an evaluative process conducted by the district which included administrators, teachers, and parents. This process revealed a community desire for improved gifted services to be delivered at the middle school level. The district also had a need to balance enrollment across all of the middle schools, so in August 2008, INQUIRE Academy, BISD's gifted middle school magnet, opened at Jane Long Middle School (JLMS) to serve gifted and high achieving students. The only criteria for acceptance into INQUIRE was identification as a gifted or high achieving student based upon district requirements. JLMS has a high number of at-risk students from low socio-economic homes, and a reputation in the community of having low-test scores and high levels of behavior problems. While this was a problem at one time, great gains have been made in all academic areas and massive changes have been seen in student behavior over the past eight years. Even though student achievement and behavior have progressed tremendously, community members unassociated with JLMS still believe its previous reputation to be true. Therefore, recruiting students to attend INQUIRE can be a challenging event due to the school's population and reputation. This study seeks to understand how gifted students who decided to attend INQUIRE arrived at their decision.

Statement of the Problem

The *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* (Texas Education Agency, 2000) serves as a guide for the development of gifted programming, a tool for program evaluation, and a means of accountability for educators and school districts. It calls for services that provide an array of learning opportunities in the four core academic areas, along with opportunities for students to work with their intellectual peers and their age peers, as well as opportunities to work independently. “Meeting the diverse and challenging needs of gifted and talented pupils is a crucial part of every teacher’s job. And traditionally mainstream teachers, through no fault of their own, have not been very good at it” (George, 2003, pg. vii). School districts must have a clear understanding of how they define giftedness. Their definition will determine how and which children will be selected for participation in the gifted program. School programs must be congruent with district definitions of giftedness or students will not successfully benefit from the gifted program (George, 2003). Programs should also match the individual needs of the gifted students. Profoundly gifted students have extremely different instructional needs than the mildly gifted and cannot be expected to be responsible for the same curriculum (Silverman, 1998). Schools typically provide gifted services through programs that supplement education in the regular classroom. Pullout programs have students leave the main classroom for a certain amount of time weekly to receive services in a specialized class with other gifted students. Inclusion programs place gifted students into a general education classroom with students who have a wide range of intellectual abilities. Teachers are expected to meet the needs of the gifted

students through curriculum differentiation. Winner (1997) states, “A gifted child in the regular classroom may be the only such child in the room; hence, he or she will not have the opportunity to learn with others of like ability” (p. 1070). Neither of these program options best meets the needs of the gifted student, as they are not challenged at their intellectual ability on a consistent basis throughout the day. The clustering of gifted students together into a classroom for a long period of time during the day is a better option. Evidence supports that gifted students show remarkable academic gains when they are grouped together for the majority of the day. It gives the students more time together where they can intellectually challenge and stimulate each other (Winner, 1997). Even within a clustered group of gifted students, educators must “Realize that gifted and talented pupils are not a homogeneous group. They do not all exhibit the same traits or characteristics, but rather a wide range of individual differences” (George, 2003, pg. 4).

The past several decades have seen a rapid rise in the number of gifted magnet programs across the nation. These programs draw gifted students together across a district, cluster them together on a full time basis, and provide services geared specifically for students with the ability for higher level thinking and functioning. They target students who feel their needs have not been met in the regular school setting and provide parents with a choice in where to send their children to school. According to Archbald (2004), “School choice using magnet schools remains the most common approach in relation to the number of districts and children involved” (pg. 283). Some districts designate specific schools to house the gifted magnet programs. Other districts

place the gifted magnet within an existing school, using the “School-within-a-school approach, where special programs are provided for high-ability students who take most of their course credits as a specialized cohort, thereby creating the feeling of a small and cohesive multi-grade-level school within a larger school” (Matthews & Kitchen, 2007, pg. 256). Schools-within-a-school are appealing to people who feel normal school structures are not meeting the needs of gifted students due to the lack of differentiation in activities and curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experience a student goes through in choosing to attend a brand-new gifted middle school magnet that follows a school-within-a-school model and is located on a highly at-risk campus. This study examined how students arrived at their decision to attend the gifted magnet by taking an in-depth look at their thoughts, reasoning, and decision-making processes. It analyzed the influence of outside factors or persons on the students’ decision, and investigated student expectations for the program. The qualitative case study research method was used to study and analyze the decision-making processes from the point of view of gifted middle school students. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze and describe the experience of selected students who choose to participate in a new gifted program.
2. To identify whom or what influenced their decision.

3. To determine the expectations of the students for the new gifted program.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the thought processes, reasonings, and decisions experienced by the students who chose to attend INQUIRE Academy?
2. Whom or what influenced the students' decision to attend INQUIRE Academy?
3. What were the student's expectations for their experience at INQUIRE Academy?

Limitations

Because this study focuses on one specific gifted program, it is not appropriate to generalize the findings to other school settings. This study's focus is to determine the decision-making experience of the student that chooses to come to a gifted program housed within a highly at-risk school. It is hoped that the information gathered from this study will help the INQUIRE leadership team develop the program to meet student expectations and needs, as well as to create accurate, intriguing promotional and recruiting activities for the program in future years.

Definition of Terms

Gifted magnet program - A program designed to draw gifted students together across a district, cluster them together, and provide services geared specifically for students with the ability for higher level thinking and functioning.

Gifted student in BISD – A student who scores in or above the 97th percentile on *Ravens Progressive Matrices*, or who scores 129 or above on the *Slosson Intelligence Test-Revised*, or who scores 129 or above on the *Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales*, and shows evidence of the ability for higher level thinking and functioning based on a campus Selection Committee decision.

High achieving student in BISD – A student who scores between the 90th-96th percentile on *Ravens Progressive Matrices*, or who scores between 120-128 on the *Slosson Intelligence Test-Revised*, or who scores between 120-128 on the *Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales*, and shows evidence of the ability for higher level thinking and functioning based on a campus Selection Committee decision.

Low socio-economic homes in BISD – Homes who qualify for the free and/or reduced lunch program based upon federal definitions.

School-within-a-school – A school design model where a special program targeting a certain population of student is housed within a larger school.

Design of the Dissertation

As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to gain a thorough understanding of the decision-making process of gifted students who choose to attend a new gifted magnet program, to determine who influenced their decision, and to analyze their expectations for the program. Chapter I of the dissertation covers this purpose in depth. Chapter II provides a review of current literature on the definitions and measurement of intelligence, the definitions of giftedness, the characteristics and needs of gifted students, and the programming of gifted services. Chapter III reveals the methodology used in this study and explains how the subjects were selected for participation. Chapter IV offers a thick description based on the interviews of the six participants providing the reader with profound insight into their decision-making process. Chapter V examines the three main themes to emerge from the interviews, provides a summary of the results of the interview questions, and demonstrates how the findings from this study support the research from current literature.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Intelligence

Attempts to define intelligence have intrigued psychologists and sparked debates for over a century. Psychologists have argued with evolving statistical techniques over the relative contribution of genetics and environment to measure intelligence for nearly as long. Despite these frequent disagreements, psychologists “Find the conception of intelligence to be a useful construct in understanding human behavior and learning” (Feldhusen, 1998a, pg. 19). In the 1860’s, Francis Galton studied human intelligence and ability. He was interested in the inheritance of mental abilities and felt intelligence was an “Innate, general, cognitive ability” (Baldwin, 2005, pg.108). Building upon Galton’s work, in 1904, Charles Spearman, a mathematician, developed statistical methods to analyze Galton’s data. Spearman wanted to show mathematically the existence of a single factor that could be used to differentiate mental ability. This “Constituted the first major effort to develop a theory of intelligence with empirical underpinnings” (Wasserman & Tulsky, 2005, pg. 16). Spearman proposed a theory of intelligence, which he labeled, *g*, for general intelligence. He viewed it as a type of mental energy that could be applied to all mental tasks (Baldwin, 2005; Feldhusen, 1998a; Johnsen, 2004). He believed *g* was the underlying factor that was measured on all tests of intelligence, but he also felt there were other factors involved. Using a two-factor theory, he alleged that on any given mental abilities test, 67% reflected general factor, *g*,

which he viewed as common variance, shared across the tests, and 37% reflected specific factor s , which he viewed as test or subtest variance, unique to the tests being used (Baldwin, 2005). Spearman brought to the study of intelligence an awareness that there could be other specific mental abilities not included in g (Baldwin, 2005; Feldhusen, 1998a).

L. L. Thurstone challenged Spearman by proposing a primary mental abilities theory of intelligence. Thurstone felt an individual should not be described by a single intelligence index, but rather by a profile of mental abilities. Using a factor analysis model, he found seven unrelated primary intelligence abilities. These included word fluency, verbal comprehension, numerical ability, memory, induction, spatial perception, and perceptual speed (Feldhusen, 1998a). This led to an understanding that “People have differentiated and unique patterns of cognitive capabilities...which are really components of general intelligence” (Feldhusen, 2005, pg. 66). While Thurstone originally rejected Spearman’s theory of g , he later cautiously admitted the possible existence of g (Baldwin, 2005; Wasserman & Tulsky, 2005). Thurstone’s factor analysis model led to many of the contemporary views of intelligence that are around today, and has parallels to Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (Feldhusen, 1998a; Wasserman & Tulsky, 2005).

Raymond Cattell, a graduate student of Spearman’s, proposed two separate general factors of intelligence, which he called fluid and crystallized intelligence. Fluid intelligence deals with inductive and deductive reasoning ability, and is biologically determined. It is used where the need to adapt to new situations is required.

Crystallized intelligence refers to the stores of knowledge a person has, the ability to access those stores, and the ability to acquire new knowledge based on familiar learning strategies (Feldhusen, 1998a; Johnsen, 2004; Wasserman & Tulsy, 2005). Cattell and his partner, John Horn, conducted factor analytic studies and identified ten basic components of fluid and crystallized intelligences: fluid reasoning, acculturation knowledge, visual processing, auditory processing, processing speed, correct decision speed, short-term memory, long-term memory, visual sensory detection, and auditory sensory detection (Feldhusen, 1998a; Wasserman & Tulsy, 2005), thus showing that intelligence is an result of the interaction between “Innate, inherited abilities and culturally determined experiences” (Feldhusen, 1998a, pg. 23).

J. P. Guilford’s Structure of the Intellect (SOI) theory was an attempt to isolate and identify “The basic abilities that are a part of human intelligence” (Maker & Nielson, 1995, pg. 358). The SOI model was based on new methods of factor analysis and has three dimensions: content, operations, and products. Content is the information on which thinking operates and has four categories: figural, symbolic, semantic, and behavioral. An operation is performed on the content and involves thinking processes and skills. There are five types of thinking processes that can be performed: cognition, memory, convergent production, divergent production, and evaluation. Products are the result of the operation on the content. There are six types of products: units, classes, relations, systems, transformations, and implications. The interaction of these three dimensions, content, operations, and products, can yield at least 120 human abilities (Feldhusen, 2005; Maker & Nielson, 1995). The SOI demonstrated the need to consider

that intelligence was effected by a wider range of processing abilities than previously thought (Baldwin, 2005). Guilford felt his factor analysis model proved that verbal and nonverbal tasks were not performed by the same intellectual ability (Wasserman & Tulskey, 2005).

Robert Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence is an information processing model of intelligence that has been credited as being the major model of human intelligence, which dominates the worlds of psychology and education today (Feldhusen, 1998a; Winner, 1997). Sternberg's model proposes three information processing abilities: metacomponents, performance components, and knowledge-acquisition components. Metacomponents consist of planning, monitoring, and evaluative functions related to problem solving. Performance components are mental processes that carry out those metacomponent abilities, and may be unique to specific domains. Knowledge-acquisition components involved selective encoding, selective combination, and selective comparison. Selective encoding is the ability to identify crucial information and place it in long-term memory, as well as the ability to eliminate non-crucial information. Selective combination is the ability to combine and organize information into related pieces or chunks. Selective comparison is the ability to see connections between past and present information and the ability to apply it to present situations (Feldhusen, 1998a). Sternberg believed that intelligence was used to adapt, change, or select an environment (Feldhusen, 1998a; Plucker & Barab, 2005). While this theory of intelligence currently dominates in psychology and education, it is difficult to assess through traditional measures (Baldwin, 2005).

Howard Gardner offers an alternative definition of intelligence that dismisses the relevance of IQ testing and focuses on the value of different human strengths (Reis & Small, 2001; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). Gardner defines intelligence as “The ability to solve problems, or to fashion products, that are valued in one or more cultural or community settings” (Gardner, 1993, pg. 7). He believes intelligence is a result of the interaction of eight biological aptitudes that individuals may have in varying amounts. His theory of multiple intelligences describes these eight independent abilities: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, bodily kinesthetic, and naturalist. Linguistic intelligence is the ability to use words and language. Logical-mathematical intelligence is the ability to use reason, logic, and numbers. Spatial intelligence is the ability to think in pictures and create vivid mental images. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand other people. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to self-reflect. Musical intelligence is the ability to produce and appreciate music. Bodily kinesthetic intelligence is the ability to move and use the body for expression. Naturalist intelligence is the ability to discriminate among living things (Feldhusen, 2005; Gardner, 1993; Reis & Small, 2001; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Winner, 1997). Gardner believes the purpose of school is to develop these different intelligences and to help people achieve goals based on their intellectual strengths (Gardner, 1993). Identifying intelligence as defined by Gardner is difficult through traditional means (Baldwin, 2005; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). No matter the model used to define intelligence, most psychologists, today, agree that intelligence is a combination of a person’s cognitive, affective, physical, and intuitive

functioning that provides the ability to think, learn, problem solve, and create new ideas, and that levels and types of intelligence vary from person to person (Clark, 1997; Feldhusen, 1998a).

Measuring Intelligence

While many psychologists have been critical of Spearman's *g* factor over the years, it has been used repeatedly in the development of intelligence tests. Galton was the first to develop tests with objective techniques in an attempt to measure intelligence. These tests included measures of physical characteristics, sensory acuity, motor strength, reaction time, and visual judgments. He standardized his data from 1884-1890 with 9,337 individuals. James Cattell, who worked with Galton, continued the development of these tests and called them mental tests. These tests were designed to focus on measuring the body and the senses instead of the higher mental processes (Baldwin, 2005; Wasserman & Tulskey, 2005).

Alfred Binet is credited with being the father of modern intelligence testing. He attempted to design a test that would separate out the higher-order thinking abilities. After working many years attempting to measure these separate abilities and recognizing the limitations of some of Galton and Cattell's assessment measures, he abandoned the effort to measure each faculty separately. Instead Binet used the sum total of the higher mental processes and called it 'intelligence'. In 1905, he, along with Theodore Simon, developed the Binet-Simon Scale, which reliably identified children with mental retardation. This scale was revised several times and extended for use into adulthood.

These tests measured language, auditory processing, visual processing, learning and memory, and judgment and problem solving. Henry Goddard arranged for the translation of the Binet-Simon Scale from French to English, and introduced the scale in America. Lewis Terman adapted the Binet-Simon Scale while at Stanford University, and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale became the top-ranked assessment instrument in psychology. With this development, psychologists and educators were able to access and measure a person's intelligence with an intelligence quotient or IQ score (Gardner, 1993; Wasserman & Tulskey, 2005).

World War I brought the use of the Army Alpha and Beta Tests, which measured the intelligence of the Army recruits. Arthur Otis, a graduate student of Terman's, had adapted the Stanford-Binet tests from individual to group administration and Terman shared this new method with the psychologists responsible for the development of the Alpha and Beta tests. These tests were so successful in determining the abilities of the recruits that after the war was over psychologists began seeking civilian uses for the tests. The tests were adapted, re-packaged, and sold commercially; thus, launching the widespread use of intelligence testing in schools, colleges, industry, and the military (Gardner, 1993; Wasserman & Tulskey, 2005). The work of David Wechsler in the 1950's and 1960's brought the reign of the Stanford-Binet as the most widely used intelligence test to a halt. Wechsler's intelligence tests borrowed liberally from elements of the Army test battery. Few of the items in his tests were original creations. Wasserman & Tulskey (2005) state, "It appears that Wechsler's strength was not in writing and developing items. Instead, Wechsler was a master at synthesizing tests and

materials that were already in existence” (pg. 12). Wechsler’s work continues to dominate the educational and psychological fields today. Gottfredson (1998) says, “Intelligence as measured by IQ tests is the single most effective predictor known of individual performance at school and on the job” (pg. 24). She asserts that these findings are widely accepted by intelligence researchers, but are downplayed, dismissed, or ignored by the press and the public, who want to believe that all people are “Born equally able and that social inequality results only from the exercise of unjust privilege” (Gottfredson, 1998, pg. 24). Standardized tests, which measure *g*, are popular in education, because they are easy to administer, are time efficient, and provide a quantifiable number that can be replicated with high degrees of reliability. These tests are thought to measure raw ability and potential performance reflective of inherent capacities (Gardner 1993; Gottfredson, 1998). It is difficult to measure intelligence that has been defined by modern researchers as being multi-dimensional. There are few tests that can be given to assess intelligence based on these contemporary theories due to the lower subtest reliabilities and the limited promise to date of profile analysis (Baldwin, 2005). Educators must use observation, student work samples, and anecdotal records to qualitatively document evidence that signs of intelligence and potential are present. These data gathering methods require a large amount of time to complete, and educators are reluctant to use their time in this manner when they can quickly administer an intelligence test and get quantitative data (Baldwin, 2005).

Defining Giftedness

“Giftedness has traditionally been conceived as intellectual giftedness, as an ability to learn and perform remarkably well in any of a variety of intellectual domains, especially the academic and artistic; hence, the longstanding reliance on standardized tests and teacher referrals to identify unusually high levels of intellectual aptitude or achievement” (Gottfredson, 2004, pg. 141). Jenson (2004) agrees,

Giftedness in the broad sense refers to human abilities and traits that are out of the ordinary – a rather unbounded assortment of not necessarily correlated categories generally comprising exceptional levels of intelligence; precocity; various specialized physical and mental abilities; and talents...Giftedness in the narrow sense refers to a high level of general mental ability, or psychometric *g*...An individual’s position on this dimension relative to some defined population can be roughly estimated by mental tests (pg. 157).

Schools typically label students ‘gifted’ if they score more than two standard deviations above the mean on standardized tests, which is equivalent to IQ 130 (Jenson, 2004; Winner, 1997). Unfortunately, federal laws mandating the right to a free and appropriate public education for gifted students do not exist as they do for students with disabilities (Kearney, 2000). Federal laws for students with disabilities call for the identification of the degree of a student’s developmental delay, and then prescribe appropriate interventions for educators (Gross, 2008; Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000). These levels of delay are mild (IQ 55-69), moderate (IQ 40-54), severe (IQ 25-39), or profound (IQ 1-24), and are based upon scores from standardized tests. Labeling a student’s degree of giftedness is not common practice in education, although these students also have a wide range of abilities and need prescribed appropriate interventions. A rough estimate of levels can be given based upon how many standard deviations above the

norm the IQ falls. These levels include mildly (IQ 115-129), moderately (IQ 130-144), highly (IQ 145-159), exceptionally (IQ 160-179), and profoundly (IQ 180+) gifted (Gross, 2008; Silverman, 1998; Winner, 1997). “The primary classifying feature of both gifted and retarded groups is intellectual deviance. These individuals are out of sync with more average people, simply by their differences from what is expected for their age and circumstance. This asynchrony results in highly significant consequences for them and for those who share their lives” (Robinson, Zigler, Gallagher, 2000, pg. 1413).

The launch of *Sputnik* in 1959 by the Soviet Union shocked the American people and the American educational system began to be viewed negatively. Monies were poured into research and the development of gifted programs across the country, but a unified approach to serving these students was never developed. In 1969, the United States Congress commissioned a study of an in-depth look at the status of educational services for gifted students. The Marland Report, written as a result of this study, suggested that gifted students in American schools were not being challenged or served, and often faced antagonistic teachers (Clark, 1997; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Gardner, 1993; VanTassell-Baska, 1998b). From this report emerged a new definition of giftedness that did not rely solely on high intelligence, but rather subscribed to a multifaceted approach. The Marland Report’s definition of giftedness reads:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude
3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability (VanTassel-Baska, 1998b, pg.8).

This report led to the emergence of new theories of giftedness, as people began to consider the possibility that giftedness was multiply defined rather than reliant on simple IQ scores for identification (Baldwin, 2005; Newman 2008). Many of the new theories to emerge proposed the interaction of children's innate intelligence with environmental elements in order for giftedness to be nurtured and grown. Other theories said giftedness could be domain specific, rather than simply a general intellectual ability, with some people having above-level abilities in multiple areas, while others said no matter the definition of giftedness, intelligence still plays a major factor (George, 2003; Newman, 2008; Plucker & Barab, 2005; VanTassel-Baska, 1998b). Renzulli defines giftedness as the interaction of behaviors, where above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity meet (Plucker & Barab, 2005; Winner, 2007). Renzulli sees a difference between schoolhouse giftedness and creative/productive giftedness. Schoolhouse giftedness is the ability to take tests, learn lessons, and show academic abilities. Creative/productive giftedness is the ability to produce original knowledge, materials, or products. He believes there is an interaction between these two types of giftedness and that they should both be developed (Moon & Dixon, 2006; Reis & Small, 2001). "Individuals capable of developing gifted behavior are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially

valuable area of human performance” (Reis & Small, 2001, pg. 4). Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences suggests giftedness can occur in any of the eight independent domains and that student’ areas of strengths should be identified and developed (Gardner, 1993; Winner, 1997). Gagne’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent is a “Developmental model of giftedness that distinguishes between giftedness and talent” (Moon & Dixon, 2006, pg. 13). This model proposes that natural abilities, or gifts, must be converted into talents in intellectual, creative, socio-affective, or sensorimotor domains through catalysts which can either inhibit or assist the talent development (Johnsen, 2004). His model includes five types of intrapersonal catalysts: physical characteristics, motivation, volition, self-management, and personality, and four categories of environmental catalysts: surroundings, persons, undertakings, and events. Activities both in and out of school help to provide the required practice necessary to convert these gifts into talents (Johnsen, 2004; Moon & Dixon, 2006). Tannenbaum’s model of giftedness includes a combination and interaction of five different factors: general ability or g; special abilities or aptitude in a specific area; non-intellective factors, such as dedication and willingness to make sacrifices; environmental influences, such as parents, schools, and peers; and chance factors, which are unpredictable circumstances of life. This model requires the identification of student strengths and opportunities to practice and develop those strengths (Baldwin, 2005; Johnsen, 2004).

When compared to their age peers, gifted children are developmentally ‘out-of-sync’. “Asynchrony refers to the uneven rates of cognitive, emotional, and physical development found in gifted children” (Clark, 1997, pg. 30). Asynchronous development places the gifted outside normal developmental patterns from birth into adulthood (Kearney, 2000; Morelock, 1992).

If development is perceived as a life-long process, giftedness can then be understood as producing atypical development throughout the lifespan in terms of awareness, perceptions, emotional responses, and life experiences. This places the gifted individual developmentally out of sync both internally, in relation to the different aspects of development, and externally, in relation to cultural expectations (Morelock, 1992, pg. 15).

The study of asynchronous development began with the work of Leta Stetter Hollingsworth, the founding mother of gifted education. She viewed giftedness as “A set of complex psychological issues arising out of the disparities between these children’s mental and chronological ages” (Silverman, 2002, pg. 33-34). Kearney (2000) cites Hollingsworth as noting, “To have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties” (pg. 4). Asynchrony has been shown to increase as IQ increases due to the greater distance between the mental and chronological ages, which can create social and emotional adjustment issues leading to higher stress levels for the students (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Morelock, 1992; Silverman, 2002). “Asynchrony also involves uneven development and feeling out of step with societal norms. All of these factors create social and emotional vulnerabilities and require differentiated parenting, teaching, and counseling to promote optimal development in gifted individuals” (Silverman, 2002, pg. 32). In 1991 the Columbus Group, a team of prominent psychologists and educators in the area of giftedness,

proposed a phenomenological definition based on their belief that asynchronous development plays a major role in how giftedness is defined. They assert that “The contemporary tendency to define giftedness as behaviors, achievement, products or school placements, external to the individual, necessarily misses the essence of giftedness - how it alters the meaning of life experience for the gifted individual”

(Morelock, 1992, pg. 15). The Columbus Group define giftedness as:

Asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gift renders [children] particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002, pg. 147).

This definition moves the focus of giftedness away from the external achievements of the individual, such as high performance in school or high grades, and onto the internal qualities and processes of the person. It focuses on the life experiences of the individual and how those experiences are perceived differently based on the amount of asynchrony they experience (Kearney, 2000; Morelock, 1992; Silverman, 2002). “The view from within allows us to see a three-dimensional gifted child rather than giftedness simply as manifested through two-dimensional achievement criteria” (Morelock, 1992, pg. 14).

Parents and teachers of gifted students are able to witness on a daily basis the uneven development that occurs for these students. “Their support for asynchrony should be taken as an indicator that here indeed is a phenomenon worthy of investigation” (Alsop, 2003, pg. 119). Morelock (1992) states, “Surprisingly, however, up until now, definitions of giftedness, and research based on those definitions, have dealt minimally

with reality as seen through the eyes of the gifted” (pg. 13). Alsop (2003) adds, “At the very least, asynchrony serves as a necessary if not sufficient reminder of the resilience children of high intellectual potential need in order to realize their promise” (pg. 126).

In 1993, the U.S. Federal Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act updated the definition of giftedness first proposed in the Marland Report. This new definition incorporated current understanding and thinking regarding gifted students (Clark, 1997; George, 2003). The Javits’ definition reads:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas; possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (George, 2003, pg. 2).

While a federal definition of giftedness exists, individual states are still responsible for determining how gifted students are served within their jurisdiction. The State of Texas defines giftedness as:

A child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment, and who:

1. Exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
2. Possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
3. Excels in a specific academic field (Johnsen, 2004, pg. 3).

The definition of giftedness has evolved over time and is still continuing to develop. As the field of gifted education has grown, so has the knowledge about gifted students and

their abilities. No matter how giftedness is defined, these natural abilities within a child do not guarantee that the child will grow to be a gifted adult living up to their full potential. These natural abilities can be stifled without the opportunities to develop these gifts (Clark, 1997; George, 2003; Feldhusen 2005; Gottfredson, 2004; Silverman, 1998). According to Alsop (2003),

At risk of being lost is the recognition of the needs of those children whose enhanced intellectual potential is identifiable and measurable. The fact is that whatever other human attributes the field accepts under the generalized rubric of gifted – triarchic or multiple, talent or gift – there still remains the fundamental proposition of a measured distance from the mean. To date that measurement has only been validly and reliably achieved by intelligence testing (pg. 118).

Characteristics and Needs of Gifted Students

Gifted students are often "Ostracized as being different and weird and are labeled as *nerds* and *geeks*" (Winner, 1997, pg. 1070). Gifted students have obvious cognitive and affective differences when compared to non-gifted students. These differences often develop at an earlier age than is typical of their same age peers (Winner, 1997).

Cognitive differences can include the ability to manipulate abstract symbol systems, the power of concentration, a well-developed memory, early language development, curiosity, a preference for independent work, multiple interests, and the ability to generate original ideas. Other cognitive differences include the ability to grasp information more quickly, the need for fewer repetitions to gain mastery, the knowledge of content several grade levels above their age peers, active problem solvers, and the ability to multi-task (Caraisco, 2007; Johnsen, 2004; Reis & Small, 2001; Robinson,

Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, 1998a; Winner, 1997). Affective characteristics of gifted students can include a sense of justice, altruism and idealism, a sense of humor, emotional intensity, perfectionism, high levels of energy, strong attachments and commitments, and aesthetic sensitivity. Other affective differences include enjoying time by themselves, introversion, independence, non-conformity, persistence, passion about areas of interest, preference for older friends, becoming bored with routine tasks, having a higher self-esteem in regards to intellectual ability, and being intrinsically motivated (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Johnsen, 2004; Reis & Small, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, 1998a; Winner, 1997). It is important to understand that every gifted student will not display all of these characteristics, and that these characteristics can fall on a continuum, especially when students exhibit asynchrony. Therefore, gifted students will have a variety of combinations of these characteristics, along with varying strengths for each of the characteristics that they possess (George, 2003; Reis & Small, 2001; VanTassel-Baska 1998a). Due to these combinations and strengths, these characteristics may form different personalities. No two gifted students will ever look alike. It is also important to remember that these characteristics are developmental and can be displayed at various times. Some may appear earlier than others and some may appear later. These characteristics may only reveal themselves when students are engaged in areas of strength or interest (Alsop, 2003; Clark, 1997; George, 2003; Kearney, 2000; Morelock, 1992; Reis & Small, 2001; VanTassel-Baska 1998a).

Educators must be aware of these cognitive and affective differences in order to provide opportunities for these characteristics to be demonstrated and strengthened.

Often the brightest children in the schools are the ones that are learning the least and making the smallest gains in achievement. They are often just going through the motions of learning and are not actually engaged with the teacher. Instruction must be motivating and delivered at an appropriately challenging level, so gifted students do not become apathetic, angry, depressed, or engage in disruptive classroom behaviors (Caraisco, 2007; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Winner, 1997). “The relationship between interest and motivation is crucial for talented youngsters who often spend hours, days, weeks, or years deeply involved in what absorbs them. Indeed, that sustained interest over time is an essential factor in giftedness and talent development in young people” (Caraisco, 2007, pg. 257). Educators need to have a thorough understanding of how gifted students learn in order to successfully meet their needs in the classroom. Otherwise, inappropriate programming, where instruction does not match the student’s needs, will produce less than desired intellectual development. “Often ignored in the debate about the success of American public education is the relatively poor performance of America’s brightest students” (Benbow & Stanley, 1996, pg. 249). When compared to students from other industrialized nations, American gifted students’ performance ranges from average to the bottom of the group. These students need to be challenged and stretched at appropriate levels for their abilities in order to grow to their full potential (Benbow, 1998b; Callahan et. al., 2000; Winner, 1997). When schools do not provide opportunities to extend students and help them to reach their full potential, society as a whole loses. Talent is wasted that could have been channeled to benefit the individual and the community as a whole. Unless American schools change the way they

teach their highly and profoundly gifted students, the country is going to lose its ability to economically compete with other industrialized nations (Benbow, 1998a; Clark, 1997; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; George, 2003; Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000; Silverman, 1998; VanTassel-Baska, 2007).

Programming of Gifted Services

School districts must have a clear understanding of how they define giftedness. Their definition will determine how and which children will be selected for participation in the gifted program. School programs must be congruent with district definitions of giftedness or students will not successfully benefit from the gifted program (George, 2003). Programs should also match the individual needs of the gifted students. Profoundly gifted students have extremely different instructional needs than the mildly gifted and cannot be expected to be responsible for the same curriculum (Benbow, 1998a; Gross, 2008; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Silverman, 1998). In the United States there are no federal guidelines, monies, or consistent methods for educating gifted students as there are for special education students. State governments have the power to make policies regarding the education of gifted students; therefore, policies vary from state to state (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Winner, 1997). The Texas State Board of Education has laid out a plan for the delivery of services for Texas students. Their goal states:

Student who participate in services designed for gifted students will demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and

are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment (Texas Education Agency, 2000, pg. 1).

This plan serves as a tool for program evaluation and accountability for educators and school districts. It calls for services that provide an array of learning opportunities in the four core academic areas with opportunities for students to work with intellectual peers, age peers, and independently (Texas Education Agency, 2000).

There are two broad classes of program delivery for gifted students, those that supplement and enrich regular classroom instruction, such as pull-out programs, out-of-school summer programs, and inclusion programs, and those that make fundamental changes to classroom instruction, through full-time ability grouping, acceleration, and special schools (Winner, 1997). Pullout programs are designed to provide enrichment to the gifted child's regular education experience by having students leave the main classroom where they spend the majority of their time to receive services in a specialized class with other gifted students for a few hours weekly. These programs typically teach creative and critical thinking skills, problem solving, mini-courses, and provide opportunities for projects and presentations (Winner, 1997). Students participating in pullout programs need to continue to be challenged in the general classroom where they spend most of their time. Instruction must be differentiated and adjusted to the ability level of the child. Examples of enrichment models include Renzulli and Reis' Enrichment Triad/Revolving Door Model, Treffinger's Individualized Program Planning Model, and Feldhusen and Kolloff's Purdue Three-Stage Model (Feldhusen, 1998b; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2001; Winner, 1997). Pullout programs have been

criticized because they are not tied to a specific subject or to a student's area of giftedness, and only provide part-time academic support for gifted students (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Winner, 1997). Out-of-school summer programs and talent searches also provide enrichment activities for gifted students. Students qualifying for selection into these programs participate in advanced level testing opportunities as well as fast-paced summer courses for high school credit. Examples of out-of school summer programs and talent searches include Julian Stanley's Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth at Johns Hopkins University, the Talent Identification Program at Duke University, the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University, and the Rocky Mountain Talent Search at the University of Denver (Matthews, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2007; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2001; Winner 1997). These programs are powerful enrichment opportunities for students who choose to participate. They provide students with the opportunities to be exposed at an earlier time to advanced testing and courses, as well as opportunities to meet and interact with other highly gifted students like themselves (Matthews, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2007; Winner, 1997). Inclusion programs place gifted students into a heterogeneous classroom with students who have a wide range of intellectual abilities. In this setting teachers are expected to meet the needs of all students through curriculum differentiation. With the implementation of high stakes testing, the focus of the classroom becomes aimed at the struggling students. When this occurs, the gifted students are left to entertain themselves while the teacher spends time working with the struggling students. This can lead to apathy, boredom, a lack of engagement, and a lack of reaching individual student

potential. Very often in inclusion programs, there are few gifted children in class together. This prevents them from having opportunities to work with and be intellectually stimulated by other gifted students and can contribute to low motivation (Alsop, 2003; Benbow & Stanley, 1996; Callahan et. al., 2000; Caraisco, 2007; George, 2003; Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000; Schroth, 2008). Gottfredson (2004) compares serving gifted students within the same classroom to sports teams, saying, “This is akin to asking a single coach to develop, in the same training sessions, the talents of the school’s top prospects in basketball, football, tennis, and swimming. When all types are served together, none is served well” (pg. 154). Neither pullout programs nor inclusion programs best meet the needs of gifted students, as they do not challenge gifted students at their intellectual ability on a consistent basis throughout the day.

Programs that make essential changes to student instruction and allow students the opportunity to advance based upon their individual abilities best meet the needs of gifted students. Ability grouping, also known as clustering or homogeneous grouping, is extremely flexible and can take several forms within schools. It may include the creation of a self-contained class for gifted students. It could mean grouping high ability students together within a classroom, even across multiple ages, for specific subjects, or it could mean placing children into schools designed especially for gifted students. The clustering of gifted students together on a full-time basis provides them multiple opportunities throughout the day to be intellectually challenged and stimulated. Students can readily be regrouped as needed throughout the day. Flexible grouping of students is not the same as tracking. When students are tracked, they fall under a specific type of

plan, such as a high school graduation plan. In tracking, students often encounter difficulty if they try to change the level of the plan they want to follow. A flexible grouping arrangement is not set in stone. Students and teachers have the flexibility to move within the program (Benbow, 1998b; Feldhusen, 1998b; Gross, 2008; Hunt & Seney, 2001; Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000; Schroth, 2008; Winner, 1997). To be effective, students in a clustered setting must receive a differentiated curriculum with appropriate modifications. Winner's (1997) meta-analyses of evaluations of self-contained classes for gifted students showed that "The typical gain for gifted students in accelerated, ability-grouped classes was almost one year more on standardized tests than gains made by equivalent-ability students in heterogeneous classrooms" and "The typical gain for gifted students in enriched, ability-grouped classes was about four to five months greater than gains by matched students in regular classrooms" (pg. 1076).

Acceleration is another program intervention that allows students to advance based upon their individual abilities. Acceleration can be a fast-paced course, grade skipping, or early entrance to school. It can also be advancing a student several levels in a particular area of precociousness. Acceleration is possible and desirable in all areas of the curriculum, but should only be done in areas of student strength. Grade skipping and early entrance to school are two of the most cost-effective ways to meet the needs of gifted students (Benbow 1998a; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Feldhusen 1998c; Gross, 2008; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Winner, 1997). Myths suggest that students who are accelerated more than one year above their grade level will have social and emotional difficulties interacting with their above level peers; however, this has

been shown to be false in multiple studies. Research shows this to be untrue in that gifted students who are accelerated easily adjust and get along well with their intellectual peers (Alsop, 2003; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 2005). Acceleration is not pushing students to advance or learn before they are ready. Students should be consulted regarding acceleration prior to determining whether acceleration is the right option for a particular student. Students are the ones who must make the social adjustments that go along with acceleration and their view on the matter is critical in order for this strategy to be successful. Students in favor of acceleration usually are able to make the transition with minor difficulty (Benbow 1998a; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 2005). Acceleration generally leads to desirable outcomes, including increased motivation to learn, and has been shown to be one of the most effective services for gifted students (Alsop, 2003; Benbow, 1998a; Feldhusen, 1998c; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 2005).

Schools designed especially for gifted students are not as common as flexible grouping programs and acceleration options. Private schools, while not advertising that they target gifted students, often cater to the high-achieving student and usually have admissions requirements for entry into the school. It is rare to find public magnet schools at the elementary and middle school level, which target gifted students, but it is more common to find public magnet high schools for the gifted (VanTassel-Baska, 1998b; Winner, 1997). During the past several decades, there has been a rapid rise in the number of gifted magnet programs across the nation. These programs draw gifted students together across a district, cluster them, and provide services geared specifically

for students with the ability for higher level thinking abilities. The programmatic specializations provided by magnet schools provide parents with a choice in where to send their children to school. This can promote healthy competition among schools causing schools to evaluate themselves and the programs that they offer (Archbald, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 1998b). Some school districts designate specific schools to house the gifted magnet programs. Other districts place the gifted magnet within an existing school, using the school-within-a-school model. Schools-within-a-school are appealing to people who feel normal school structures are not meeting the needs of gifted students due to the lack of differentiation in activities and curriculum. Evidence supports that gifted students show remarkable academic gains when they are grouped together for the majority of the day because they are surrounded for the most part by people who want to be at school and want to learn (Matthews & Kitchen, 2007; Sayler, 2006).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative case studies focus on “Human behavior and the settings in which that behavior takes place” (Erlandson et. al, 1993, pg. 5). They reflect the significance and reality of the individualized experience as experienced by the participants. Because this study sought to understand what factors contributed to a gifted student’s decision to leave their home campus and attend INQUIRE Academy, a new gifted middle school magnet in BISD, the qualitative case study research method was chosen. INQUIRE is housed at JLMS, a highly at-risk campus which has a negative reputation within the community. To understand how these students arrived at their decision to attend the gifted magnet, the researcher took an in-depth look at their thoughts, reasonings, and decision-making processes. The influences of outside factors or persons on the students’ decision were analyzed, and student expectations for the program were investigated. A thick description of each subject’s thoughts and actions was developed to re-create and portray the experience each participant lived.

Participants

The participants involved in this case study were selected through purposeful sampling with maximum variation. Criteria for selection were pre-determined to narrow the list of participants to those that fit the qualifications of the study. In order to qualify as a participant, a student must have been identified as gifted or high achieving by BISD

criteria, must not have attended JLMS in 2007-2008, must not live in the JLMS attendance zone for 2008-2009, and must have actively chosen to attend INQUIRE by submitting an application for acceptance in the spring of 2008. Of those remaining eligible students, any student who had met with the Gifted and Talented (GT) Coordinator during the recruitment period or who had a prior relationship with the GT Coordinator was eliminated from the sampling pool. The demographic characteristics of the entire INQUIRE student population prior to the selection criteria are shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the eligible participants in the sampling pool after the selection criteria were applied. Every attempt was made to balance grade level, gender, ethnicity, and zoned middle school for the final participants selected. In the end the researcher selected six subjects that exhibited a wide range of gifted characteristics.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the INQUIRE Student Population

GRADE Students	GENDER		ETHNICITY				ZONED SCHOOL			
	Male	Female	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Caucasian	DMS	JLMS	RMS	SFAMS
6 th grade (N=42) (%)	22 (52)	20 (48)	0 (0)	1 (2)	14 (33)	27 (65)	4 (9)	21 (50)	5 (12)	12 (29)
7 th grade (N=50) (%)	15 (30)	35 (71)	1 (2)	6 (12)	20 (40)	23 (46)	10 (20)	21 (42)	7 (14)	12 (24)
8 th grade (N=37) (%)	18 (49)	19 (51)	0 (0)	5 (14)	10 (27)	22 (59)	5 (14)	19 (51)	7 (19)	6 (16)
Total (N=129) (%)	55 (43)	74 (57)	1 (1)	12 (9)	44 (34)	72 (56)	19 (15)	61 (47)	19 (15)	30 (23)

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Research Pool

GRADE	GENDER		ETHNICITY				ZONED SCHOOL		
Students	Male	Female	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Caucasian	DMS	RMS	SFAMS
6 th grade (N=12) (%)	7 (58)	5 (42)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (25)	9 (75)	4 (33)	5 (42)	3 (25)
7 th grade (N=10) (%)	4 (40)	6 (60)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (40)	6 (60)	2 (20)	4 (40)	4 (40)
8 th grade (N=9) (%)	5 (56)	4 (44)	0 (0)	1 (11)	3 (33)	5 (56)	2 (22)	5 (56)	2 (22)
Total (N=31) (%)	16 (52)	15 (48)	0 (0)	1 (3)	10 (32)	20 (65)	8 (26)	14 (45)	9 (29)

Of the six subjects selected for participation in this project, two were from each of the three grade-levels, four were male, two were female, one was African-American, two were Hispanic, and three were Caucasian. Wayne is a sixth grade, Caucasian male who would have attended Davila Middle School (DMS). Jenny is a sixth grade, Caucasian female who also would have attended DMS. Elliott is a seventh grade, Caucasian male who previously attended Rayburn Middle School (RMS). Arthur is a seventh grade, Hispanic male who previously attended SFA Middle School (SFAMS). Mary is an eighth grade, Hispanic female who previously attended SFAMS. Robert is an eighth grade, African-American male who previously attended RMS. These names are fictitious and were selected by the students in order to remain anonymous during this study.

Instruments

The human investigator was the only qualitative instrument used in this study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe the advantages of using the human as the sole data-gathering instrument for case study research. These advantages are:

1. The human instrument is able to respond to personal and environmental cues.
2. The human instrument can collect information from multiple factors and at multiple levels simultaneously.
3. The human instrument can view the phenomenon and its context holistically.
4. The human instrument can build upon the base of tacit knowledge by picking up non-verbal cues.
5. The human instrument can create and test hypotheses within the context of the setting.
6. The human instrument is able to summarize data and seek clarification from the respondent on the spot.
7. The human instrument can analyze atypical responses to gain a higher level of understanding.

Procedures

The researcher, who serves as the BISD GT Coordinator, had access to all documents used by school personnel to gather data on students. The following procedures were conducted during this case study:

1. The researcher examined student applications to INQUIRE and compiled demographic data and student expectations from all students who completed the year at INQUIRE. The students who left during the year were not included
2. Selection criteria for students who would be participating in the study were developed.
3. The subjects were purposefully selected for participation based upon selection criteria.
4. Student and parental permission for participation was gathered prior to the beginning of the study. Permission documents were stored in the office of the GT Coordinator.
5. Structured interviews with the participants were scheduled and conducted in a one-on-one setting in the GT Coordinator's Office which is located in the INQUIRE office area. Each interview lasted less than an hour and was conducted at a time that did not interfere with direct instruction.
6. Transcripts were created and analyzed within twenty-four to forty-eight hours of each interview.

7. Brief, unstructured, follow up interviews were conducted with students as needed to fill in gaps of missing information or to further develop themes that had arisen.
8. During the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to read their interview transcripts and make any corrections or additions they felt were necessary.
9. Changes were made to the transcripts within 24-48 hours as needed after this follow up conversation.
10. Interview transcripts were converted into a thick description of each student's thoughts and actions to summarize the process they went through to make their decision to attend INQUIRE.
11. The transcripts and descriptions were reviewed by Diana Hood, INQUIRE Academy Coordinator, for the purpose of ensuring adequate representation of the students thoughts and actions. Her feedback was incorporated into the final description.

Data Collection

All participants were interviewed at school during a time that did not interfere with direct class instruction. Some students were interviewed before school, others during lunch, and others during a class period in which testing was occurring. Students were allowed to come for the interview after they had completed their test. The interviews occurred in the GT Coordinator's Office which is located in the INQUIRE office area. Each interview began by asking the students about their families and their

interests. These preliminary questions were asked to help the students relax, establish a comfortable relationship with the interviewer, and allow the participants to see how the interview would be structured. Once these topics were exhausted, each participant was led through a guided discussion using the same set of protocol questions. Additional question probes were used for clarification or elaboration as needed based upon the individual responses.

Analysis of Data

Data gathered through interviews and student applications was collected, analyzed, and coded by categories as per constant comparative methods described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson, et. al (1993). In this method, information is broken down into individual units, and the units are compared and categorized by theme. Related themes within the units are noted for the purpose of comparing and determining relationships and patterns. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through the following techniques:

1. To establish creditability, or internal validity, the researcher conducted prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checks. Prolonged engagement was established throughout the year by talking with the students in the hallways or while visiting with them in classrooms. The students were familiar with the researcher's daily presence and her role at the school and were comfortable responding to or initiating conversations with the researcher. Triangulation was conducted by analyzing answers from survey

questions located on the INQUIRE student applications that all INQUIRE students completed as part of the application process and comparing those findings to the answers of the research participants. Results showed the answers of the participants were very much in-line with the other INQUIRE students. Member checks were conducted with-in a few days of the original structured interview. Participants were asked further clarifying questions during an informal follow-up interview, if needed, provided an opportunity to read the transcript of the interview, and given the chance to add any additional information or make any corrections to incorrect information contained in the transcript.

2. To establish transferability, or external validity, the researcher developed a highly detailed and rich description that will allow other researchers to determine the transferability to future situations that are similar to this one.
3. To establish dependability, or reliability, the researcher participated in peer debriefing sessions with an objective person for the purpose of examining the data for consistency of the findings.
4. To establish confirmability, or objectivity, the researcher reflected constantly to identify and eliminate any personal biases.

The qualitative research method used in this study allowed the researcher to delve into the life experience of the subjects and to gain an understanding of the thoughts, reasonings, and decision-making processes each participant underwent in deciding to attend INQUIRE.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Background Information

In order to have a full understanding of the significance and need for INQUIRE in BISD, a brief historical look must be taken at how this program came into being. The INQUIRE Academy was created out of a community demand for improved gifted services to be delivered at the middle school level, as well, as a district need to balance enrollment across all of the middle schools. In 2004 a Task Force Committee (TFC), which consisted of administrators, teachers, and parents, was created to analyze and evaluate the gifted program in BISD. The outcome of the TFC brought about several changes to the district. The identification of high achieving students as well as gifted students was implemented in 2005. The district recognized that high achieving students had different learning needs from average students and began offering different services for them, in addition to the services offered to gifted students. This included the addition of a Differentiated Learning Plan for gifted students who needed more differentiation than was being offered in the regular classroom. The second change that arose from the TFC was the realization of the need to create a gifted magnet school that would draw gifted students together across the district and place them together in one learning environment. In 2006 the district began studying the feasibility of implementing such a program. In 2007 BISD created a full-time District GT Coordinator position. Previously the responsibility for the gifted program was an additional duty given to one of the

Content Curriculum Coordinators. The creation of this position allowed for full-time attention to overseeing the implementation of gifted and high achieving services across the district, overseeing the identification and assessment of gifted and high achieving students, and providing state required staff development to the teachers who sorely needed a better understanding of gifted students.

About the same time that the TFC was meeting to study the gifted program, it became evident to BISD Board of Trustees that a new middle school would be needed to house the growing student population in BISD. Plans were made to add a fourth middle school to the three already in existence - JLMS, RMS, and SFAMS. The district had implemented an open enrollment policy at the middle school level allowing parents to request transfers to schools other than the ones they were zoned to attend. RMS, perceived by some of the community as the “best” school to attend because, they typically have higher state test scores and a lower minority ratio when compared to the other schools, was overcrowded due to a high number of transfer students. This left JLMA and SFAMS with smaller student populations and higher minority counts. The results of the open enrollment policy were an imbalance in student numbers at each middle school. With a new middle school set to open in 2008, the district recognized a need to attempt to balance student enrollment while still allowing parents to have a say in where their child attended school. Trustees felt that attending the new middle school, Davila Middle School (DMS), with its beautiful and fresh facilities, materials, and supplies, would be exciting to many people, and that the innovativeness of the building would be a draw for numerous students. This left the Trustees to consider the type of

programs that would draw students to the other two campuses to even the numbers and ethnicity across the district. In response to results from the TFC and demands from gifted parents, the Board of Trustees decided to create two magnet school programs to be placed at SFAMS and JLMS, both which would operate as schools-within-a-school and open in 2008. The Odyssey Academy (Odyssey) was placed at SFAMS for students interested in math, science, and technology. This program was designed to be an enrichment model with a focus on space exploration to Mars. This magnet school would open only with sixth graders, and would grow a grade level each year as those students promoted. Odyssey would be open to any interested student who wished to apply; however, they would use a screening process to select high performing students.

The INQUIRE Academy was placed at JLMS for students in sixth through eighth grade who had been identified as gifted or high achieving. The only entry requirement would be that students must have been identified as gifted or high achieving by district criteria prior to applying to attend. Prior to the opening of INQUIRE, JLMS's student population has a majority of at-risk students from poverty. In 2007-2008, they were 81.7% economically disadvantaged, 64.5% at-risk, 12.9% limited English proficient, 8.4% special education, 54% Hispanic, 31.2% African-American, and 14.4% Caucasian. While JLMS's faculty and staff had worked diligently over the years to make great gains in student test scores and behavior, people not associated with the school still believed its previous negative reputation to be true. BISD hoped that the placement of a gifted magnet at this campus would attract students and help erase its negative reputation in the community. INQUIRE was designed to follow the *International Baccalaureate (IB)*

Middle Years Programme (MYP) and would focus on teaching students to be global citizens, internationally minded, and community servants. To promote the new program, INQUIRE extensively advertised through media presentations, parent meetings, and question and answer sessions, in hopes of attracting those gifted and high achieving students who felt that their academic needs had not previously been met, and those who desired to work with other gifted students. INQUIRE offers a wide range of courses for high school credit, an interdisciplinary curriculum, and opportunities for students to accelerate their learning. Gifted and high achieving students attending JLMS because it is their zoned campus and who did not apply for INQUIRE, were placed into the program with parental permission. This decision was made, as school officials saw no need to offer two separate gifted programs within the same school. INQUIRE opened in 2008-2009 with 141 students in grades 6-8. During the year, six students returned to their zoned campus and six had moved outside of BISD, leaving enrollment at 129 for the remainder of the year.

As the GT Coordinator for BISD, I was responsible for the creation, development, promotion, recruitment, and opening of INQUIRE. My office is housed in the INQUIRE office area at JLMS. I am frequently in INQUIRE classes interacting with students and teachers. The INQUIRE students know who I am; in fact, some think I am the Principal. Most feel comfortable with me and will speak in the hall as they pass by. Many have been into the INQUIRE office area and know where my office is located. As the researcher for this project, I felt my relationship with and proximity to the students would be beneficial during the interview process to help reduce any stress the

participants might feel during the interview. All interviews occurred in my office during the school day at times when students would not miss direct instruction. The following case studies reveal how the selected subjects arrived at their decision to attend INQUIRE Academy, the process they went through in deciding to apply to INQUIRE, the influences upon their decision, and their expectations for INQUIRE.

Wayne

My interview with Wayne occurred May 11, 2009 at 12:00 p.m. in my office. He came into my office after finishing lunch in the cafeteria. The students were on a special testing schedule this day and would remain in one class all day long. Because he had finished testing prior to lunch and the other students in his class were still testing, if he had been in class, he would have been sitting quietly and reading, waiting for the other students to finish. This provided the perfect opportunity for me to visit with him without causing him to miss direct instruction. My desk is pushed into the corner of the room against the wall. Next to my desk there are two chairs along the wall. Wayne came into my office and sat down in the chair right next to my desk. I was sitting in a chair facing him, at the edge of my desk. I thanked him for agreeing to participate in my research project and explained to him that he could choose to stop the interview at any time. He appeared extremely nervous about the interview process, but agreed to participate. During the interview, he wiggled in his chair, leaned forward, and swung his legs back and forth. His answers to my questions were very direct and succinct. He fully answered my questions, but volunteered very little elaboration. During the interview, he revealed

that he was shy in new situations until he warmed up. This would explain his reluctance to elaborate on the questions I asked. Even though Wayne knew who I was and was familiar with me, being in my office and talking to me in an official capacity was new for him and made him nervous. If an observer had walked in a classroom and watched Wayne interact, they would not have thought he was shy. He is usually very talkative, interacting with the teacher and other students, but that is a daily environment for him, one where he is extremely comfortable.

Wayne is an eleven-year old, sixth grade, Caucasian male. He is short in stature when compared to others his age, and slender in build. He has short blond hair and blue eyes that normally sparkle. His nervousness regarding the interview has removed the usual shine seen in them. He attended Bonham Elementary School for fourth and fifth grade and would have attended DMS, if he had not chosen to attend INQUIRE. Before moving to Bryan and attending Bonham, Wayne lived in Illinois, California, and Virginia. He stated, "I have never stayed in the same school for more than two years. Even though I was at Bonham for two years, we were not in the same building both years. Bonham built a new school and moved campuses between my fourth and fifth grade years." Wayne is the oldest child and has a younger sister, who is nine, and a younger stepbrother, who is seven. His parents are divorced and he alternates where he lives during the week. He lives with his mom from Monday through Wednesday and his dad on Thursday. He alternates the weekends between his parents. His mother has the odd numbered weekends and his father has the even numbered ones. His father has remarried, but his mother has not. Wayne has to stay organized to keep up with his

homework and belongings between two houses. If he leaves something at one parent's house, he has to wait until he goes back to that house to get it. He mentioned that one of his parents is not as structured as the other and often changes their mind about things that have been planned. He does not like this. His living arrangements demand organization and structure, and when the structure fails or gets changed, he becomes frustrated. Wayne likes to spend time playing with his friends. He describes himself as "Outgoing and good at making friends. I am a good friend to others. I can be shy and quiet in new situations until I become comfortable with the people around me." He enjoys playing outside as well as inside. Like most middle school boys, he likes to play video games and watch television. "I am interested in TV shows where I can learn, like the *History Channel* and *Animal Planet*. I change up the shows and channels that I watch so I can find new things to learn about." He also enjoys watching "Cartoons, *CSI* - all three versions, and shows on the paranormal". He describes himself as very social, enjoying and wanting to spend time with his friends, and yet he can entertain himself when his friends are not around. In school Wayne enjoys reading, math, and science, but he is "Not into writing." As a sixth grader he is taking Language Arts 7, Math 7, Science 6, Social Studies 6, Spanish I, Technology Applications, Orchestra, and P.E. He was able to accelerate in language arts and math by testing during the summer. Two of his favorite things about INQUIRE Academy are the laptop he has been issued and the technology class he is taking. "I love computers and all things related to them. They have intrigued me, since I was young. I always want to learn how to do new things with technology." Wayne is an active boy and looks forward to going to P.E. every day. He

likes to play “Hoops” and is on a baseball team as well. He sees himself attending college after high school but doesn’t know what he wants to study yet. Wayne is an avid reader and enjoys reading a complete series of books. Some of his favorites are *Harry Potter*, *The Unfortunate Events*, *Aragon*, *Narnia*, and *The Lord of the Rings* series. He views himself as a “Book collector” and has begun building a “Mini-library”. He enjoys sharing his books with others and making recommendations for them to read.

Wayne first heard about INQUIRE from his elementary teachers. “I have been in gifted classes at Bonham since fourth grade. The GT teachers talked to us about INQUIRE one day. I thought I would be able to get ahead and not be in classes where you already knew stuff.” Reading instruction has always been “Dull and too easy for me”. He was frustrated about being in classes where he wasn’t learning. “I didn’t like to stay with people who were learning things I already knew. I wanted to learn new things. It gets old hearing the same thing over and over again.” He gave an example of this from fourth grade when they were learning long division. “I learned it quickly, and we kept going over and over it.” Wayne was looking for a challenge. He was tired of school being so easy. He thought the new program “Sounded like something that would be good for me because I could get into higher-level classes where I could learn more and then get out of school faster”, which were both important goals he had set for himself. He was excited about studying new subjects that were not available to him in elementary school, like Spanish, technology, and orchestra. Wayne wanted to learn how to play an instrument and to learn about music, so he was excited that he would be able

to participate in orchestra. He was thrilled at the thought that he would be with “Students who wanted to get ahead and who were not flunking their classes.”

In making his decision to attend INQUIRE instead of DMS, Wayne talked with his parents and his GT teacher at Bonham. All encouraged him to attend. They were excited for him to have this new opportunity. He attended one of the parent information meetings held at JLMS in the spring to learn more about INQUIRE, but “Actually made the decision to attend when I first heard about the program. I had enjoyed the GT activities that I had been involved in since fourth grade so much, that I knew I wanted to continue those types of experiences. Since first grade, my goal for myself has been to gain more knowledge.” Wayne did not feel his friends were shocked to hear that he had decided to go to INQUIRE. “If they were surprised, it was in a positive manner.” Most of his friends were in his gifted class and had decided to attend INQUIRE too, so “We all ended up coming together.” His decision to attend INQUIRE was not effected by his friends’ decisions to come. “I would have come even if I had been by myself, because I wanted to be challenged and to learn new things. It is nice though that my best friend, who lives down the street from me, also comes to INQUIRE.” To be challenged was the reason Wayne chose to attend INQUIRE. He feels the school has met his expectations. “INQUIRE Academy has allowed me to accelerate into two seventh grade classes. I am currently taking seventh grade reading and math. This summer I am going to take Credit By Exam for seventh grade Texas History. If I pass, I get to be in eighth grade. I took a risk to come here, but this has been a good experience for me and I don’t regret coming.” Our interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. At the conclusion, I thanked Wayne

again for his participation, and he returned to class. I conducted a brief follow-up interview with him two days later in the hallway between second and third period. We moved to the side of the hallway, out of the way of traffic, to talk. I asked for elaboration and clarification on several of the points that he had made during our first interview. He willingly gave me the answers to my questions, read over the transcript of our interview, made some comments regarding the transcript, and then made his way into class. I followed him to let his teacher know not to count him tardy since he had been with me.

Jenny

My interview with Jenny occurred May 13, 2009 at 1:30 p.m. in my office. The students were testing school-wide and were on a special schedule where they remained in one class all day long. She had completed her test and was sitting quietly, reading, waiting for the other students to finish when I pulled her from class. She eagerly came with me to escape the monotony of sitting quietly in class. I thanked her for agreeing to participate in my research project and explained to her that she could choose to stop the interview at any time. She did not appear nervous, but seemed excited and eager to begin our conversation. She entered my office and sat in one of the chairs next to my desk. I sat across from her.

Jenny is a twelve-year old, sixth grade, Caucasian girl who attended Bonham Elementary School from kindergarten through fifth grade. Jenny is of average height for a sixth grader. She has extremely short hair that is currently colored reddish-orange. She frequently changes hairstyles and color as a show of her independence and desire to be

different. She would have attended DMS if she had not chosen to attend INQUIRE.

Jenny is the oldest child in her family with two younger brothers, ages nine and ten. She plays a large role in their care giving. Her mother is a single mom who works two jobs to support the family, leaving the house before 6:00 am and returning after 6:00 pm each day. Jenny is responsible for waking everyone up and getting them all to the bus stop in the mornings. She then watches her brothers after school until her mother gets off of work. This means she cannot stay after school for tutoring if she needs help in a class, or to participate in any extra-curricular activities. Jenny does not complain about this arrangement. She is mature beyond her years and understands that as the eldest in the family she must help look out for her younger siblings. Jenny is very confident in who she is, as is evident by the way she dresses. She does not dress in the conventional ways of other middle school girls. In the past she has come to school wearing colored knee socks with high top tennis shoes and shorts, pink tutus, blue hair, red hair, a shaved head, and a Mohawk. She has multiple ear piercings and wears brightly colored clothes and jewelry. "I like to express myself through my dress. I don't care what others think about me. I like to be different from others and don't want to blend in and be like everyone else." Jenny describes herself as a 'tom-girl'. "I like bugs, playing in the park, getting muddy, and yet I like to be clean also." She enjoys hanging out with girls, but says, "Most of my friends are boys." She feels each group wants her to pay exclusive attention to them and feels "Stuck in between the two groups with no friends sometimes, when I want to be friends with both." This year as a sixth grader, Jenny is taking all on level courses: Language Arts 6, Math 6, Science 6, Social Studies 6, Spanish I,

Technology Applications, Drama, and P.E. She was unable to participate in the summer acceleration testing due to her mother's work schedule. Jenny is fond of history, especially the Civil War period. In reading on her own about the Civil War, she learned how to make yarn dolls. "Now in my free time, I make yarn dolls with moveable parts." Her mother has mentioned to several teachers that Jenny is extremely crafty and imaginative. She uses her imagination in a variety of ways. She enjoys "Puzzles of all kinds, especially crosswords. I have invented a game of completing the crosswords without using the given clues." The words she uses have nothing to do with the clues, but are simply words she comes up with that use the appropriate number of letters and fit together correctly. Jenny describes herself as "A deep thinker who analyzes things from different perspectives." She provides some examples of this: "Watching movies and thinking about how it could have ended better; playing video games and thinking about what it would be like to be an actual character in the game; singing songs and writing another verse to the song; and thinking about 'what would happen if' situations." One specific example of her deep thinking includes, "If someone gave me a map, I would not use it to figure out where I was going. I would wonder who made the map? Where did it come from? What type of paper is it made from? Why did they give this map to me?" Jenny also describes herself as "Outgoing, enthusiastic, curious about things, and random. I like to be funny and will throw out random words when situations get tense, to help diffuse the situation." She considers herself to be "Weird, but not creepy or mystifying, just out of the ordinary, standing out."

Jenny first heard about INQUIRE from her teachers at Bonham. “They told me that as a gifted student, I should go to this new program. I was under the impression that INQUIRE was the only middle school where I would be able to get gifted services. I did not think they would be available for me at DMS”, where she is zoned to attend. She remembers, “From Kindergarten through Third Grade, my teachers told my mom that I daydreamed too much in class.” At the time, “I didn’t realize anything was wrong with me or that I was ‘irregular’. I just always had deep thoughts going on inside my head that I thought about. To me, thinking about things is normal.” She got the impression from her teachers that “They considered me to be hyperactive, not smart, and headed to be a drop-out student.” In fourth grade, she was identified as gifted and “All of a sudden, it became ok to be ‘irregular’.” She feels her younger brother is just like her and is experiencing the same type of negative school experience that she did those first few years. For her to hear “There was a special school for other students like me, made me want to attend.” She was told she would ride two busses to get to school, a neighborhood bus that would take her to DMS and then a transfer shuttle that would take her to JLMS. “Having to ride two busses was ok with me, because I would get to school late and then leave early, allowing me to miss things that would not be very exciting.” She was also intrigued by the opportunity to take high school classes. “This would challenge me, allow me to show what I am good at, and let me improve my areas of strength.”

Even though Jenny’s teachers encouraged her to attend INQUIRE and she wanted to be with other student who were like her, she did not have high expectations of

the program based upon her early experiences with school. She originally thought INQUIRE would be its own school and not a school-within-a-school. She did not fully understand how the concept of a school-within-a school worked. While she was excited that INQUIRE would be filled with other gifted students, she worried that “It would be a place where you could express yourself, but you would have to be proper and formal with specific dress codes and hideous colored uniforms.” She worried “It would be a place where everyone was expected to think the same way and the teachers would be ‘building little machines’.” She was worried “I would be expected to know and do all of these things that I don’t know how to do.” She wondered “Whether the INQUIRE students would be doing the same things as the regular students and that it wouldn’t really be a program for gifted students after all.” Jenny had never experienced a positive school environment where she felt accepted by the teachers and the students. She thought attending INQUIRE would be another negative experience.

Jenny did not talk to many people when she was gathering information about the new program. She visited with her teachers and the Professional Development Specialist at her elementary school. “They encouraged me to attend because they felt the program would meet my needs.” She also talked to her mother who was concerned about how to get her to school. When they discovered that transportation was provided, her mother’s worries disappeared. Because they do not have a computer in their home, Jenny was not able to look up information online, and due to her mom’s work schedule, they were unable to attend any parent meetings. Jenny realized “Deciding whether or not to participate in this program was going to be one of my first major decisions that I had to

make regarding my future. Even with my worries and concerns, I chose to come to INQUIRE, because I felt the sacrifice of dealing with these problems, would eventually benefit me in the future and give me better opportunities in life.”

Jenny felt the students at her elementary school did not like or understand her because she was so different from the others in the way she dressed. “Some thought I was ‘too girly’ and others thought I wasn’t ‘girly enough’.” Although she did acknowledge that some students liked her because she was different. She imagines some students said, “Yeah, she’s not going to go to my school next year!” while others said “Oh boy! She’s going to be at my school!” These real and imagined reactions of Jenny’s classmates did not play a part in her decision to attend INQUIRE. “I knew several of the students from my elementary school were considering going to INQUIRE. However, their decisions did not impact my decision. Once I made up my mind to come, I would have come even if they did not.” Not knowing how classes would be scheduled at the new school, “I was prepared to not see some of the people I knew on a regular basis.”

After being in INQUIRE for a full year, Jenny is happy with her decision to attend. “INQUIRE has not been what I thought it was going to be. I was prepared for another negative experience, so what happened was really better. This program has helped me. I have learned how to use my abilities and how my abilities work. I have been able to be myself, and let loose. I have more friends now than before. There are no foes or enemies trying to bring down my day. The students here are more accepting. They saw how different I was, said ‘ok’, and then went on with things. There are no bullies here. People accept you for who you are, even if you dress differently.” In

discussing her grades, Jenny mentions that they are not perfect, but they are much better than they were last year. “I have learned to be responsible this year and I get my work turned in on time. I am very happy with my decision to attend INQUIRE.” Our interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. At the conclusion of it, I thanked Jenny again for her participation and she returned to class. I conducted a brief unstructured follow-up interview with Jenny the next day. I caught her in the hallway during class change and asked her to read the transcript of our interview. We moved over to the side of the hall out of the way of traffic. She read the transcript, provided me with a few clarifications on several of the points that she had made and elaborated on other areas. When we were finished, she waved merrily and skipped down the hall to class. I followed her to let her teacher know not to count her tardy.

Elliott

My interview with Elliott occurred May 12, 2009 at 7:45 a.m. in my office. He came to school early specifically to visit with me. He sat in one of the chairs next to my desk and I sat across from him. I began our conversation by thanking him for agreeing to participate in my research project and especially for agreeing to come in early to visit with me. I explained to him that he could choose to stop the interview at any time. Because he had been into my office numerous times throughout the year, he did not appear nervous and was eager to begin our conversation.

Elliott is a thirteen-year old Caucasian male who is in the seventh grade. He is much taller than the average seventh grader. In fact, he is easily as tall as an average

tenth grader. He tends to be a bit chubby around the middle still. He has brown hair that reaches to his shoulders and bangs that hang into his face. He wears glasses. His eyes are brown and full of sadness. He resembles a hound dog with sad eyes and droopy ears. He describes himself as “Being from East Texas, a very tall, fluffy person with long hair, and very intelligent.” He considers himself to be very mature, focused, helpful, and supportive to others. As a sixth grader, he attended RMS, where he was tested and identified as gifted. RMS was his first experience in a BISD school. Prior to RMS, Elliott lived in Marshall, Texas, where he attended kindergarten through fifth grade. Elliott has one older brother who is sixteen and attends Bryan Collegiate High School (BCHS). This is an Early College high school, which partners with Blinn College, so students have the opportunity to earn up to sixty hours of dual credit for high school and college. Elliott would like to attend BCHS like his brother and get a head start on college. “I am currently leaning towards a career in Radio and Broadcasting. I have been told for many years that I speak well and should consider this field.” This year he has had the opportunity to work on Lobo Live, the school announcements, and has received “Very good comments from the teachers. I was told that I spoke clearly, that students were listening to the announcements when I was the news anchor, and that I was able to get information out to the students.” He felt like the teachers were being honest with their comments and this “Carried more weight for their suggestions to consider entering this field”. Being a member of the broadcasting team has helped boost his confidence and helped him to believe that people might be “Telling me the truth about my ability.” Elliott has also considered being an author in the future since he likes

to write. He worries about two problems with this career that he has not figured out how to solve. He said, “Sometimes you get stuck at finding an ending to a story and the story is left hanging. You aren’t able to find a way to end it.” In describing the second problem, he states, “The opinion of the reader when they are finished reading your work is always important. What if you are writing about your personal interests and then no one wants to read it?” Elliott feels he has plenty of time before he has to make a final decision on his career choice.

Elliott has extremely high expectations for himself and others. When people do not live up to his beliefs on how they should act, he gets exceedingly frustrated and anxious. “I feel I am strict in my expectations of others. I want others to perform and behave in the manner that they should.” He does not have much patience for what he sees as immaturity and childish behavior; therefore, many of his age peers are not patient and tolerant of him. He does not recognize that his attitude and behavior towards others often adds to the conflict he experiences with other students. Elliott’s math teacher resigned in October due to family issues. A substitute was hired to cover the class until a suitable replacement was found. The teacher’s leaving was sudden and the students were not prepared in advance for this to happen. After interviewing several candidates, both JLMS and INQUIRE administration decided to hire the substitute teacher as the full time teacher, so the students would not be subjected to having three teachers in three months in this one class. Elliott had an extremely hard time with this transition. He enjoyed the teaching style of the first teacher, but not the new teacher. Because he was not pleased with the events, he did not transition well. He felt “The class was chaotic

and out of control.” He was frustrated with the student behavior in this class, as well as the new teacher’s inability to control the behavior. He spent many hours in the counselor’s office throughout the year discussing his agitation, frustration with the students, and his anxiety over the class. According to his mother, Elliott has always been a highly anxious child. The parents have worked with him at home for years trying to help control his anxiety. Elliott needs to have structure in place and does not want that structure changed once it is established. If change is needed, he needs to be prepared for it in advance, and then have the change made quickly. In his opinion this did not happen, and “It caused me a great deal of stress and anxiety.” He felt like the math class was “Horrible because of the students, and because the teacher was not suited in this position.” He felt she needed more training on how to work with gifted students. From an administrator’s point of view, Elliott was accurate in his analysis of what was occurring in the classroom. Steps were taken to work with the teacher and help her to improve her skills. Unfortunately, Elliott felt “The help given to her was inadequate.”

Elliott first heard about INQUIRE while in the sixth grade at RMS. A parent information meeting was advertised and his father attended. This meeting discussed that “The students would all have laptops, and all of the students at the school would be gifted. This peaked my interest. I thought the program sounded a lot like Bryan Collegiate. I liked the thought of smaller classes and a smaller school.” He also wanted to find an environment that was more challenging than the ones offered in his previous schools. “I am always the first to turn in my work because it is so easy. I want more challenge in my day and I want to be around students who are interested in learning.”

Elliott's frustration with his age peer's behavior and attitude is strong. He wanted to find a place with students "Who wanted to learn like I do. At INQUIRE I expected the students to have a desire to be there and to learn. I thought the rules for student behavior would be strict so that learning could occur." He knew INQUIRE would be a part of JLMS, but actually envisioned it being more of a separate entity having less interaction with the JLMS students. "I hoped to find more people with similar interests to mine."

Elliott talked to his teachers at RMS and his parents about the new program. "Unfortunately the program was so new that my teachers did not have much information about it to share with me." In order to gather more information, Elliot and his mother came and took a tour of JLMS last spring. According to the some of the teachers he met, Elliot asked many higher-level questions about the program, almost as if he were interviewing the school to see if it met his qualifications and criteria. "My parents offered me advice but let me make the decision about whether or not to come. I mulled it over in my mind. Deciding to come to INQUIRE was not a hard decision to make. I knew the classes and tests would be harder and would present some challenge, but not enough to make my head explode." He was intrigued by the idea of having his own laptop, being with other gifted students, and taking all Pre-AP courses. "Being at RMS was not a good experience for me. I felt like the student behavior was out of control. I felt that the school was chaotic, and people just did whatever they wanted to. Girls would be hitting boys. People would run around like chickens with their heads cut-off. Kids would play in class and refuse to do their work. They were very immature." Elliott felt these students should have known to act better and was very frustrated with their

behavior. RMS had a large student population, which was an adjustment for him coming from a much smaller school district. His previous school had only half the number of students. “I felt very awkward and uncomfortable at that school.” Elliot did not make many friends while he was at RMS. “There were a couple of boys that I ate lunch with and that I talked to, but we were not close friends and I couldn’t open up and really talk to them about what I thought or felt.” At first he didn’t tell these friends that he was thinking about changing schools because the program was so new and he wasn’t sure what the program was going to be. Once he gathered some information and did tell them, “They didn’t listen and just moved the conversation on.” When asked how this made him feel, he said, “You rarely keep your friends from sixth grade on to college anyway. I realized these were just temporary friends. I wanted to find people with interests like me, people I could open up to about who I really am.”

After being at INQUIRE for a year, Elliott states, “The program met my expectations academically. I was able to accelerate and be in ninth grade English as a seventh grader. I wouldn’t have been able to do that at RMS. I also found out how smart I am in other classes.” Elliot will be taking Credit By Exam for Social Studies 8 this summer. This is the only eighth grade class left for him to take. If he passes it at 90%, he will be able to skip eighth grade and go to high school in the fall. This is a possibility since he is currently taking Math 8, Science 8, and English I. While INQUIRE did meet his expectations academically, it did not meet them socially. “I was disappointed in the discipline of the students. I felt like the majority of the other students in INQUIRE did not take school seriously. I was extremely frustrated with the misbehavior in class and

their not wanting to be serious and learn. Their misbehavior in class prevented those of us that wanted to learn from doing so.” He spent many hours with the counselor this year discussing his frustration. He felt like “The eighth graders were more mature than the others because they had to be getting ready for high school. They understood there was a time to work and get things done.” He feels the “Sixth and seventh graders don’t get it and don’t know when to stop acting out.” He was extremely disappointed with the other students’ behavior. “I have learned that gifted does not necessarily mean mature.” Elliot did make some friends with shared interests at INQUIRE. In naming the friends he had made, two were sixth graders and four were eighth graders; however, all were as highly intelligent as he. He expressed an enjoyment for the multi-age classrooms.

“They allowed me to meet those who think like me. That might not have happened if we were in our grade level classes.” Elliot takes comments very literally and is “Often confused by the logic and reasoning of my age peers. I don’t understand how they think. There is an air of fake logic that is self-created”. He gives two examples to back up this comment. In the first situation, the teacher asked a question of the class and he gave an answer. His neighbor turned to him and told him he was stupid. “I don’t understand why they called me stupid when I knew the answer to the question.” In the second situation, he shares a table with a girl in one of his classes. The girl is tiny in stature and he is large. “Yet she takes up the majority of the table with her belongings. I asked her to move over and give me more room because I am bigger and need more space. She told me size did not matter.” He found both of these comments very confusing. In his mind, the other student responses to his comments did not make sense, so he attributes

this to their having a “Fake logic system”. Elliot’s biggest complaint about INQUIRE Academy is the “Other students lack of maturity and inability to be responsible for their business.” Our interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. At the conclusion, I thanked Elliot again for his participation and he went to his first period class. I conducted a brief unstructured follow-up interview with Elliot the next day. I caught him in the hallway between sixth and seventh period and asked him to read the transcript of our interview. We moved over to the side of the all out of the way of traffic. He read the transcript, provided me with a few clarifications on several of the points that he had made, but he did not elaborate on any area, feeling like I had captured his ideas well. When we were finished, he continued down the hall to class. I followed him to let his teacher know not to count him tardy.

Thomas

My interview with Thomas occurred May 12, 2009 at 11:30 a.m. in my office. He walked into my office with no signs of nervousness and sat in the chairs next to my desk. I sat across from him. He brought his lunch with him and ate while we talked. He ate chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes, a banana, a cookie, and drank a carton of chocolate milk. He ate all of the food on his tray very quickly, and then said he wanted more. He informed me, “Since I don’t take my medicine anymore, I am always hungry. I used to take medicine for ADHD, but they took me off of it. I wouldn’t eat while I was on the medicine because it made me not hungry.” When he finished his meal, he began walking around my office. He discovered a bottle cap and rubber bands on my desk and

began wrapping the rubber bands around the bottle cap to make a ball. He returned to his chair and worked with the rubber bands and bottle cap the entire time we talked. His hands and body were constantly in motion during the interview. He also talked non-stop. There were no lulls in the conversation. Occasionally, he would interject off-topic pieces of information or comments into his answers to my questions, and would need to be redirected to return to the topic. For the most part, he was able to stay focused on the questions I asked.

Thomas is a thirteen-year old, seventh grade, Hispanic male. He is short and slender in stature. He has brown hair that sticks up in spikes on top. As a sixth grader, he attended SFAMS. He lives with his father and stepmother. He has a half-brother who is twenty-three, and four stepsisters, ages eighteen, fourteen, twelve, and nine. He said, "My dad and I are the only men living in the house." Thomas enjoys playing video games, watching science-fiction movies, and drawing. "Drawing helps my imagination. I have a very vivid imagination." He likes to play *Mortal Combat* and thinks the game is funny because it is so unrealistic. "It is funny when the character gets shot in the face and it comes out his stomach, because that is so fake!" When he grows up, he wants to be a scientist. He wants to develop technology that will allow a video game droid or other character to come to life. "That would be cool, ok, maybe not realistic, but cool." Another invention Thomas thinks would be helpful would be the ability to talk to bugs. "I would recruit them to help me stop crime, and then people could watch them be superheroes on those true crime shows." Thomas also likes to make up words and write. When he mentioned writing during the conversation, he got very excited. He sat up in

his chair and started wiggling his whole body. “I love to write stories! When I was in fourth grade, I wrote a five page story about the Three Buccaneers, a take-off on the Three Musketeers.” He would like to write a dictionary one day that contains words he has made up. In the middle of our conversation about bringing the game droids to life, he said, “That won’t happen. I’m not a Garson or a mechanic.” When I asked him to explain the word “Garson”, he said, “It is a word that I made up. It is divided into two parts. Gar – the G stands for great invention, and son – which means son of inventing.” In the middle of the interview, he would use a word he had just made up, then, he would stop the conversation to tell me its definition, and then, he would pick up the original conversation right where he had left off. He did this so naturally. It is easy to see he enjoys playing with words and is obviously something he does frequently. Thomas enjoys music and plays the saxophone in the band. He has many areas of interest and thinks numbers and science are fun as well. He says, “I am good at entertaining myself, but I like to entertain others.” He thinks he is funny and that it is his job to entertain people.

Thomas first heard about INQUIRE from his stepmom. She had seen information online about the new program and told him about it. “She thought it sounded like a good program for me to take advantage of. At first, I thought, I would have to move in order to be able to go there. I didn’t want to move houses just to go to a new school and lose all of my friends.” He wasn’t aware in the beginning of their discussions that transportation would be provided. Once he and his parents gathered more information and realized he would not have to move, he was “More open to talking about the

program.” He attended an information meeting and met some of the INQUIRE teachers, which he thought were nice. “I became interested in the high school courses that were going to be offered.” From discussions at his school he heard other students talking about going to INQUIRE. Thomas envisioned INQUIRE to be “Challenging, because it was for gifted and talented students, and I thought it would have lots of exams.” When mentioning exams, he clapped his hands in excitement, and said, “I like taking tests!” Thomas felt “The work at SFAMS was too easy with little challenge.” He wanted more challenge in his day. “I’m very smart. Not to be bragging, but I could spell dinosaur when I was three.”

Thomas talked to his parents and his friends while he was trying to make his decision on whether to come to INQUIRE. His interest in the program was peaked because the program was targeting gifted students and would be more challenging. His father did not participate much in the discussion of the new program. “Dad simply expressed the thought that the program would be good for me.” Once his decision was made, his family supported his decision to come and thought it would be the best place for him due to the academic challenge. His friends expressed concern that “Our friendships would not last if they did not see me at school every day.” Thomas had many friends at SFAMS and he worried about making new ones. His stepmother encouraged him that he would be able to make other friends at the new school. Because he had heard others who were talking about going to INQUIRE, he was aware that he would not be coming to a new school without knowing a single person. “When my friends heard I was going to JLMS, they were shocked and surprised. They tried to talk me out of going

and started telling me all kinds of bad stuff – like there were lots of fights there; they had guns; and they smoked weed at school.” This made him think really hard about his decision, but he ended up taking their comments as a dare and telling himself, “I’m going to prove them wrong!” He decided, “I was ready to make new friends and a new life for myself.” He considers himself to be a risk-taker and will take on things he considers to be a challenge. By using his problem-solving skills, he decided he could maintain his SFAMS friendships by getting their phone numbers and staying in touch with them often. He told them “We’ll still be friends wherever we are and we’ll see each other again at Bryan High School.” He has been disappointed because he hasn’t made many friends at INQUIRE this year like he wanted to. When asked how he went about trying to make new friends, he said, “I just act like myself. My father says I don’t make many friends because I act stupid.” Thomas agrees with his dad that he does act stupid, but says, “That is how I am. I like to make people laugh.” Sometimes he is lonely, but “I have made one really good friend. We are the same age and will be together again next year before he goes to Rudder High School and I go to Bryan High School.” In the end, Thomas decided he wanted a change, a new life, stronger academics, and to prove his friends wrong about JLMS. He wanted to try something new and he chose to come to INQUIRE.

Being an INQUIRE student “Has been fun and more challenging than what I had before at my other school. I was able to accelerate in language arts and to take eighth grade language arts while still in seventh grade. This will allow me to take English I as an eighth grader. This advanced class has been harder than I thought it would be, but not

too hard. My grades are not as good as they could have been, because I didn't always turn my work in all of the time." He acknowledges being lazy on occasion. Thomas is also taking Math 7, Science 7, Social Studies 7, Spanish I, Technology Applications, Band, and Athletics. He feels he "Made a good decision to come to INQUIRE. I love being challenged and find that very helpful. I think the teachers are very smart themselves." He misses his friends from his old school and is disappointed not to have made more friends. "You need to have friends to be challenged. Who else will you compete against, hang out with, and chat with?" He concluded with the thought that "Next year there will be another opportunity to make friends." Our interview lasted approximately fifty-five minutes. At the conclusion, I thanked Thomas again for his participation and he returned to class.

I tried to conduct a brief follow-up interview with him the next day. I caught him in the hallway between fourth and fifth period. He was not in a very good mood. Something had just happened in the previous class, and he did not want to discuss it. I asked him to read the transcript of our interview, which he did, but he did not elaborate on any points. I walked with him to class to let the teacher know he was not tardy and to warn her of his mood. Thomas's moods fluctuate frequently. Sometimes when he gets upset, he will completely shut down and not cooperate or participate in the lesson. There are usually tears involved with his frustration and meltdowns. Earlier in the year during one such period of emotion, he mentioned suicide to one teacher. The teacher contacted the counselor who contacted the family. His parents took him to see a doctor who began treating him for depression. This seemed to reduce his moodiness and the frequency of

his meltdowns. The teachers keep a close eye on him and keep each other posted if he is having a hard time. The following day I caught him again and he was much happier. I asked him if he wanted to reread the transcript of our discussion since he was in a better mood. He declined and indicated that I had accurately reflected his comments and feelings and did not need to make any additions or corrections. He continued down the hall to his class.

Maria

My interview with Maria occurred May 13, 2009 at 7:45 a.m. in my office. She came to school early specifically to visit with me. Upon her arrival, she sat in one of the chairs next to my desk. I thanked her for agreeing to participate in my research project and for coming in early to visit with me. I explained to her that she could choose to stop the interview at any time. She did not appear nervous and was eager to begin our conversation.

Maria is a fourteen-year old, eighth grade, Hispanic female. She is quite tall for her age. She has long, naturally curly brown hair and brown eyes. She is always dressed up for school. She usually does not wear jeans and t-shirts like other middle school students do, but wears slacks, skirts, or dresses. She attended SFAMS during sixth and seventh grade and Neal Elementary School for kindergarten through fifth grade. She was identified as gifted in fourth grade. Maria is an only child and enjoys spending time with her parents. She says, "My dad is a big kid himself." Her family does many things together, such as playing tennis, going to movies, and working on math. "My father

teaches me new math concepts just for the fun of it.” While she enjoys hanging out and spending time with her family, she also likes to hang out with friends. “I am extremely busy and don’t have much time to spend with my friends though.” Maria works approximately seventeen hours a week for her mom who manages a local pizza restaurant. She has been working as a waitress for almost a year. She works Wednesday through Saturday each week. She has learned to budget her time and get her homework completed quickly since she works until 9:00 pm. “I get my homework done in class, at work in between customers, and on the weekends.” Maria plans to go to BCHS next year and then wants to go to college and major in computer systems or math. After college she wants to pursue acting. Because she speaks both Spanish and English, she wants to go to Mexico to break into the acting industry. “It is much more challenging to break into acting in Mexico than it is in the U.S., because the Mexican stars are used over and over for multiple roles. There are so many people who come out for auditions trying to break into the industry. It is very competitive. Once an actor does break through they will play multiple roles in television shows, movies, and soap operas and will work non-stop.” Maria, who is extremely competitive, wants to take on the challenge of beginning her acting career in Mexico and then moving over into the US industry, once she has become successful.

Maria first heard about INQUIRE when a teacher at SFAMS talked to the students about this new program. “I felt it would be a good opportunity for me. I could earn high school credit, do something different, and be at a place where I could make progress in my education.” Maria became excited about this new program because “I

welcome change. I find it fun to start over in new places and not be at the same place for a long period of time in the same conditions.” Maria was not sure what a school-within-a-school would be like. “I knew the INQUIRE students would be separated from the JLMS students, but I wasn’t sure how that would actually work. I envisioned the classes to be more rigorous and require more work than the ones I was taking at SFAMS. I thought it would be hard to keep up with the class load, but that the effort would pay off in the end.” She thought the teachers would be supportive of the students in the program and that the classes would move along at a faster pace since the students would all be on the same level. She was “Very excited at the idea of taking high school courses and being able to work at my own pace. If I had stayed at SFAMS, Algebra I would have been the only high school course I could have taken.”

Maria talked to her parents, teachers, and friends as she gathered information about INQUIRE. Her teachers encouraged her to try the new program by saying, “It would be good for you and the changes you have to make will pay off for you”. Her parents also encouraged her to try the new program. Her dad agreed right away that she should go. Her mom was a bit more hesitant because she would have to change schools after being at SFAMS for two years. “At the time, we were making this decision, we did not know that attendance zones had been rezoned due to the opening of DMS, and that I would be changing schools anyway. I would have had to go to RMS. I am lucky to have decided to attend INQUIRE and take advantage of the opportunities there instead of being sent to RMS.” Maria’s friends encouraged her not to leave SFAMS. “I had incredible friends and knew I would miss them, but I also knew we would eventually

have to separate when we go to high school, college, and get jobs. I strongly encouraged one of my best friends to come to INQUIRE with me. I found out in the middle of the summer that she had decided to come also. I made my decision to attend long before she did, so decisions of where my friends were going did not play a part in my decision. I was going to take advantage of this opportunity even if none of my friends did.” For Maria “The decision to attend INQUIRE made sense. Everything I heard about the program sounded good. It would have been weird not to have come. To ignore the advantages, would have been unwise.”

Maria found INQUIRE to be “Very interesting.” It was easier than she had imagined it would be. “I thought the courses would be extremely difficult, that I would have to do everything by myself, and that there would be piles of homework.” These were things she had previously heard about high school classes. She was pleased to find out this was not the case. She found the classes to be “Challenging, yet at a comfortable pace and level. You were able to get a good understanding of the content without getting stuck in one place.” She also thought, “The teachers were great.” She was very excited about the number of high school courses she was able to take as an eighth grader. She took six high school courses - Algebra I, Biology, English I, BCIS, Theater Arts I, and Spanish I. Maria did make new friends over time this year, just not as many as she had at SFAMS. “I am not great at making friends. I am more comfortable giving presentations and speaking in front of large groups than I am of talking one on one with people. It just comes more naturally to me.” Overall, she was extremely pleased with her decision to attend INQUIRE. Our interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

At the conclusion, I thanked Maria for her participation, and she went to her first period class. I conducted a brief unstructured follow-up interview with Maria the next day. I caught her in the hallway during class change and asked her to read the transcript of our interview. We moved over to the side of the hall out of the way of traffic. She read the transcript, provided me with a few clarifications on several of the points that she had made and elaborated on other areas. When we were finished, she smiled happily and made her way down the hall to class. Her teacher was standing in the hall talking to another student and had seen us talking, so she knew not to count Maria tardy.

Robert

My interview with Robert occurred on May 13, 2009 at 11:45 a.m. in my office. He came into my office and sat down in the chair right next to my desk. He had just come from the cafeteria where he had finished eating lunch. He had been testing during his morning class time. The students were testing school-wide and were on a special schedule where they remained in one class all day long. Robert had completed his test and if he had been in class, he would have been sitting quietly and reading, waiting for the other students to finish. I thanked him for agreeing to participate in my research project and explained to him that he could choose to stop the interview at any time. There were no signs of nervousness and he seemed eager to begin the interview.

Robert is a fourteen-year old, eighth grade, African-American male. He is the average height for an eighth grader, but more muscular than most eighth grade boys. His hair is cut short. His skin is a light, creamy brown, and he has beautiful, sparkling blue

eyes that are full of fun and mischief. He attended RMS in sixth and seventh grade and Mitchell Elementary School for kindergarten through fifth grade. Robert has two older sisters, ages twenty-three and twenty-one. He lives with his father, his oldest sister, and his two-year old niece. His mother lives in Maryland. He spends every summer with her and his family members there. Robert enjoys life and likes to have fun. "I am not a serious person. I am a happy jokester who likes to cheer people up. I feel people are free to be themselves and do not impose my beliefs on others. I am very laid back, but not lazy." In class he contributes to activities, but "I don't step up for everything. I give others a chance to participate." Robert describes himself as "An intellectual athlete. I have lots of dreams and high expectations for myself." He loves to play football. He was on the starting line of the A team in seventh and eighth grade. "I play linebacker and enjoy this position because I like to call the shots and be in charge. In this position I have to be on top of everything and have to anticipate all of the possible moves each player could make." He also enjoys math. "I have always excelled in it. I went to a UIL competition this year and found I was able to beat others I thought would blow me away!" He is interested in science and wants to be a Biochemist. "Once when I was about ten or eleven, me and my mom were watching a show on TV about a man whose skin turned to stone. I thought about the possibilities of finding a cure for this disease and how cool that would be to be able to help someone, to know that what I was doing could possibly affect millions of people." He has also considered being a Linguist in the military. His father served in the military and he is familiar with the military lifestyle. "I would like to go to college at the University of California in Berkley. That is where my

father went to school. My father is extremely intelligent, probably the most intelligent person I have ever met. My mom is highly intelligent too. She is street smart and has common sense, but my sisters, not so much,” he says as a huge grin spreads across his face. Robert is not a fan of English or history, and he does not like to write. He says, “I can write when I have to, but I don’t like to.” He will be attending Rudder High School (RHS) next fall. He is concerned about their football team’s ability to win. RHS is a new 3-A school that opened this year. It only has grades nine and ten. Last year the first class of RHS students were housed at BHS while their building was being completed. They will add a grade each year as the first class promotes up. This year the Rudder Rangers sports teams played against other Varsity 3-A teams and did not do very well. “I know the experience of playing against older guys will be good for me in the long run, but I am not excited at the thought of being on a losing team next year.”

Robert first heard about INQUIRE from a letter he received in the mail describing the program. “My father explained that the program was for gifted students and sounded like a good place for me.” He only had one teacher at RMS who mentioned the program and encouraged him to attend. “I had tons of friends at RMS and I worried about leaving them to start over, and yet I knew I would get a good education at INQUIRE.” Robert envisioned the program to be a big challenge academically. “I thought a school-within-a-school meant that the INQUIRE students would be totally separated from all of the other students at JLMS. I thought the majority of my classes would be chosen for me and I would not have a say in what I wanted to take.” He worried that “The focus of the program was academic oriented and I would not be able

to participate in athletics. I thought there would be a bunch of nerdy kids – the kind I don't usually talk to.” Robert considers himself to be extremely smart, but not nerdy. “My father made some phone calls and gathered information about the program. He encouraged me that this program would give me a good education and help me in college. I made a ‘good/bad list’ with the reasons to come to INQUIRE and the reasons to stay at Rayburn.” As information on the new program was gathered, he discovered he would be able to participate in athletics, he would be able to pick four electives instead of three like he could at RMS, and he would have choices in his schedule instead of people making the decisions for him. The only thing making him want to stay at RMS was the large number of friends that he had there. “I knew I would be able to make friends if I changed schools, so my decision was soon made. Ever since I was in Kindergarten, I have always said I wanted to be a great scholar.”

Many of Robert's friends received the same INQUIRE advertising letter he did. “Some said they were not going and tried to talk me out of going also. My coaches and friends tried to convince me to stay at RMS by telling me that I would make the A team in eighth grade.” One of the RMS students that did end up coming to INQUIRE, had not been a close friend of his while they were at RMS, but was only someone he recognized from class, and “Now we are best friends. We recognized each other and started hanging out and now we are inseparable.” His other friends' decisions to stay at RMS did not affect his decision to come. “I knew that I would be able to see my friends at RMS in the mornings while I waited for the transfer bus. I made arrangements with the Rayburn Assistant Principal to walk over to where my friends hang out and visit with them while

I wait for my bus. This way I get to touch base with them every day. I have a *MySpace* page, a *FaceBook* account, and a cell phone, so I can stay in touch with my friends all of the time. We text each other, go to the movies, and hang out often.” Robert chose to focus on the importance of his advanced academics, yet showed ingenuity in problem-solving how to maintain all of his previous friendships, which was another priority of his.

Being in INQUIRE did not meet Robert’s expectations. It actually surpassed them. “It made me happy. I can do everything I could do at Rayburn, plus more.” Robert does not regret his decision to come to INQUIRE for his last year of middle school and had no reason to leave the program and go back like some students did earlier in the year. He did not understand how others could choose being with their friends over the academic advantages offered at INQUIRE. “I found Spanish to be difficult and want to try French next year. My grades are better this year than they were last year. I have gotten into more trouble this year,” he said with a big grin, “Because of some of the friends I have hung out with and some of the decisions I have made. I was just doing what the other kids were doing and not really thinking about the consequences. I got caught up in the moment and made bad choices.” Yet, he takes responsibility for his actions and owns up to his behavior. He feels this ownership of his actions has helped him stay out of major trouble. “Teachers know I will acknowledge my part and not try to cover up my actions, so they are a bit more lenient on me. I don’t take advantage of this, but it is something that I have noticed. I know I can have a smart mouth and an attitude at times. I learned that from my sisters,” he says with another grin. Robert

thinks his decision to come to INQUIRE was a good one all the way around and he does not regret his decision to leave RMS. Our interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. At the conclusion, I thanked Robert for his participation, and he returned to class. I conducted a brief unstructured follow-up interview with Robert the next day. I caught him in the hallway during class change. We moved over to the side of the hallway out of the way of traffic. I allowed him to read the transcript of our interview. He provided me with a few clarifications on several of the points that he had made. He did not elaborate on any area, feeling like I had captured his ideas well. He continued to class as I followed him to let his teacher know not to count him tardy.

The time spent visiting with these six students provided an abundant insight into how they arrived at their decision to attend INQUIRE Academy, the process they went through in making that decision, the influences upon their decisions, and their expectations for the new program.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

While great care was taken to ensure the participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling with maximum variation, the interviews revealed that these students had many similarities. Four of the six students have attended BISD schools since kindergarten. Of the two remaining students, both have moved into the district in the past two or three years. All but one of the participants, were identified as gifted in elementary school. The last student was identified during his first year of middle school. Two of the subjects are the oldest children in their family and two are the youngest. Of the remaining two, one is an only child, and one is a middle child. Two of the participants have parents who are still married, while four of them are children of divorced parents. Half of the children whose parents are divorced have one parent who has remarried. Three of the subjects have at least one parent who received an education beyond high school. All have parents who are supportive of their child's decision to attend INQUIRE and who encourage them to pursue their goals and dreams. Five of the six students are taking accelerated courses, and all six are taking at least one course for high school credit.

Emergent Themes

Although each participant had a unique experience in choosing to attend INQUIRE, the thought processes they went through to make their decision, revealed

three dominant themes. The themes that emerged from this study were: 1) the desire for challenge overruled the comfort of the familiar, 2) the need to be surrounded by other students who love learning, and 3) the focus was on the future and not the present.

Emergent Theme One

The Desire for Challenge Overruled the Comfort of the Familiar

The strongest, overarching theme to appear throughout all six of the interviews was the desire for an academic challenge. These students felt their previous classes were too easy, dull, did not cover new material, and were repetitious with the content. They were irritated by having to listen to the same skill taught over and over when they comprehended it the first or second time they heard it. They wanted courses that would challenge them, make them think, stretch their abilities, allow them to advance in school, and graduate early. Frustration at not having these needs met throughout their school career was expressed frequently. They wanted to experience coursework that would help them prepare for better lives in the future. Coupled with the desire for a challenging education was their willingness to leave behind familiar friends and schools in order to seek this challenge. Four of the six participants had strong friendship networks at their previous schools, so this could have been a large obstacle for them to overcome in deciding to attend INQUIRE. Instead, they eagerly chose the challenging environment over the comfortable and familiar one. Interestingly, it was the two sixth graders who did not mention the strong friendship base being a concern in their decision. They were automatically going to be entering a new school environment as they left

elementary and moved to middle school, so they were already in a position of having to leave their comfort zone. Wayne, a sixth grader, said, “I thought I would be able to get ahead and not be in classes where you already knew stuff...I always want to learn how to do new things... It gets old hearing the same thing over and over again...I learned it quickly, and we would keep going over and over it...In INQUIRE I could get into higher-level classes where I could learn more and then get out of school faster.” Jenny, another sixth grader, felt INQUIRE, “Would challenge me, allow me to show what I am good at, and let me improve my areas of strength...It would benefit me in the future and give me better opportunities in life.” Elliot, a seventh grader, said, “I am always the first to turn in my work because it is so easy. I want more challenge in my day...I knew the classes and tests would be harder and would present some challenge, but not enough to make my head explode.” Elliot had only been in BISD schools for one year prior to the opening of INQUIRE and had not made many friends during that time. He articulated, “I felt very awkward and uncomfortable at my former school...The few friends that I had made, I couldn’t really open up and talk to them about what I thought or felt... I realized you rarely keep your friends from sixth grade on to college anyway, that these were just temporary friends.” Thomas, also a seventh grader, was “Interested in the high school courses that were going to be offered...I thought it would have lots of exams...I would be able to accelerate.” He added, “I had a lot of friends at my other school. They did not want me to leave. When they heard I was going to JLMS, they were shocked and surprised. They tried to talk me out of going and started telling me all kinds of bad stuff – like there were lots of fights at JLMS, they had guns, and they smoked weed at

school...I saw their comments as a dare and told myself, 'I would prove them wrong!'...I knew I could maintain those friendships by getting their phone numbers and staying in touch with them often... INQUIRE will help me with a new life, stronger academics, and proving my friends wrong about JLMS." Maria, an eighth grader, felt, "I could earn high school credits, do something different, and be at a place where I could make progress in my education...Classes would be more rigorous and require more work than the ones I was currently taking...They would move along at a faster pace." Maria had many friends at her previous school, which encouraged her not to leave them. "I had incredible friends and knew I would miss them, but I also knew we would eventually have to separate when we go to high school, college, and get jobs." Robert, another eighth grader, knew, "I would get a good education at INQUIRE...It would be a big challenge academically...It would give me a good education and help me in college." He also had a strong friend base at his former school. They tried to talk him out of going to INQUIRE and staying with them for their final year of middle school. "I chose to focus on the importance of my advanced academics and knew I would be able to make more friends at my new school."

Emergent Theme Two

The Need to be Surrounded by Other Students Who Love Learning

During the interviews, the subjects described themselves as focused, curious, responsible, imaginative, humorous, laid-back, organized, and structured. They also depicted themselves as energetic, athletic, intelligent, non-conformist, anxious,

impatient, supportive, deep-thinkers, mature, and having high expectations of themselves and others. The idea of being around other gifted students in the majority of their classes who had a desire for learning on a daily basis was an exciting one. Five of the six participants discussed this topic during their interviews. Wayne said, “I don’t like to stay with people who are learning things I already know...I was thrilled at the thought of being with students who wanted to get ahead and who were not flunking their classes.” Jenny expressed, “I just always had deep thoughts going on inside my head that I thought about...Thinking about things is normal for me...I like to analyze things from a different perspective...To hear that there was a special school for other students like me, made me want to attend.” Elliott thought, “I want to be around students who are interested in learning like I do...I hoped to find more people with similar interests to mine...People I could open up to about who I really am...I enjoyed the multi-age classes. They allowed me to meet those who think like me. That might not have happened if we were in our grade level classes.” Thomas alleged, “My interest was peaked because the program was targeting gifted and talented students...You need to have friends [who think like you] to be challenged. Who else will you compete against?” Robert echoed Thomas’s thought when he said, “The program was for gifted students and sounded like a good place for me...I thought there would be a bunch of nerdy kids – the kind I don’t usually talk to, but I was glad to find out, there were other extremely smart kids like me who aren’t nerdy.”

Emergent Theme Three

The Focus Was on the Future and Not the Present

All six of the gifted students involved in this study demonstrated that they are goal-setters, risk-takers, problem-solvers and dream-chasers. They felt challenging themselves and reaching their academic goals was a higher priority than staying in school just to be around their friends. Wayne felt strongly about his decision to attend INQUIRE. “I actually made the decision to attend when I first heard about the program. I had enjoyed the GT activities that I had been involved in so much, that I knew I wanted to continue those types of experiences. Since first grade, my goal for myself has been to gain more knowledge...I wanted to get into higher-level classes where I could learn more and then get out of school faster...I would have come even if I had been by myself, because I wanted to be challenged and to learn new things. It is nice though that my best friend, who lives down the street from me, also comes to INQUIRE.” Jenny is incredibly confident in who she is. She likes to stand out and be different from the others, as is evidenced by her clothing choices. Choosing to come to INQUIRE when her friends did not was just another way for her to show her difference. She expressed, “I don’t care what others think about me. I like to be different from others and don’t want to blend in and be like everyone else...Deciding whether or not to participate in this program was going to be one of my first major decisions that I had to make regarding my future. Even with my worries and concerns, I chose to come to INQUIRE, because I felt the sacrifice of dealing with these problems, would eventually benefit me in the future and give me better opportunities in life...Other students’ decisions to come

to INQUIRE, did not impact my decision. Once I made up my mind to come, I would have come even if they did not.” Elliott has high expectations for himself. He wants to attend BCHS and earn college credit while in high school. He toured INQUIRE and interviewed teachers prior to making his decision to attend INQUIRE. “Coming to INQUIRE was a decision I made that would benefit me. I liked the thought of the smaller classes and smaller school.” Thomas wants to be a scientist and inventor when he grows up. He said, “I’m very smart. Not to be bragging, but I could spell dinosaur when I was three...I like to draw. Drawing helps my imagination. I have a very vivid imagination...I want to be a scientist and develop technology when I grow up.” He also considers himself to be a risk-taker and a problem-solver. Maria felt, “My friends’ opinions and decisions did not play a part in my decision. I was going to take advantage of this opportunity even if none of my friends did...To ignore the advantages, would have been unwise.” Maria has set large goals for herself. She plans to go to BCHS where she can earn up to sixty hours of college credit, while still in high school. Then she expects to finish her college degree in computer systems or math. After college, she intends to move to Mexico to break into the acting industry. “It is more challenging to break into acting in Mexico than it is in the U.S., because the Mexican stars are used over and over for multiple roles. There are so many people who come out for auditions trying to break into the industry. It is very competitive.” Robert demonstrated his ability to take risks and solve problems in order to achieve his goals. “I have lots of dreams and high expectations for myself...Ever since I was in kindergarten, I have always said I wanted to be a great scholar...I knew I would be able to see my friends at

RMS in the mornings while I waited for the transfer bus. I made arrangements with the Assistant Principal to walk over to where my friends hang out and visit with them while I waited for my bus.” The desire of these students to seek a challenging education, to be around other gifted students who enjoy learning, and to strive towards their future goals were the three main themes to emerge from this study.

Summary

The results of this study showed the participants chose to come to INQUIRE, because they were looking for challenging coursework. They were tired of school always being easy and repetitious. They had set specific goals for themselves, many early in life, and felt coming to INQUIRE would help them to reach those goals. All six participants felt having friends who understood them was very important; however, attaining their goals and challenging themselves along the way was a higher priority for them than staying in school with their friends. None of the participants were deterred by the negative reputation or the ethnic make-up of JLMS. That information did not play a part in their decision to try the new program.

Research Questions and Answers

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the thought processes, reasonings, and decisions experienced by the students who chose to attend INQUIRE Academy?

2. Whom or what influenced the students' decision to attend INQUIRE Academy?
3. What were the student's expectations for their experience at INQUIRE Academy?

Research Question One

What Were the Thought Processes, Reasonings, and Decisions Experienced by the Students Who Chose to Attend INQUIRE Academy?

The students first heard about INQUIRE from teachers at their elementary and middle school campuses, or from parents who learned about the new program through an informational flier received in the mail. Hearing about the new program brought curiosity, intrigue, and interest. All of the teachers who discussed the new gifted program with the students encouraged the students to attend the parent information meeting to learn more about the new program prior to making a decision. The parents of the participants were all supportive of their child's interest in INQUIRE and encouraged them to explore this new educational program. Many of the parents tried to locate information on INQUIRE themselves. Parents and students attended the parent informational meetings to learn about the classes that would be offered at INQUIRE, the benefits of participating in this new program, and to meet the teachers that would be working with the students. Some parents made phone calls to JLMS and visited with the GT Coordinator or the Principal looking for information. Some parents looked online for information that had been posted advertising INQUIRE. One student came and toured

the school with his parent interviewing the teachers he would be having for class.

Parents and students wanted to know the types of classes that would be offered, how those classes would be different from the ones they were currently taking, the sizes of the INQUIRE classes, the benefits of having laptops, how transportation worked for students who did not live in the JLMS attendance zone, the training the teachers would have in order to work with gifted students, the time the school day began and ended, and how much interaction the INQUIRE students would have with JLMS students.

Many of the participants had some of the same first thoughts upon learning about INQUIRE. Most were thoughts of excitement and anticipation, while a few were thoughts of worry and concern. These thoughts included:

- Excitement at the opportunity to be challenged.
- Awareness that this program would be beneficial.
- Enthusiasm for attending a special school for students like themselves.
- Excitement at the opportunity to take high school courses.
- Anticipation of other gifted students being in the classes.
- Interest in smaller class sizes.
- Pleasure in knowing a place where students are interested in learning is being created.
- Exhilaration for meeting people with the same interests.
- Concern of having to conform to others' expectations of how a gifted student acts.

- Worry that it would be another negative school experience where being different meant not being accepted.

While the parents assisted the students in gathering data about the new program, they allowed their children to make the final decision regarding attendance. All of the students' decided to attend INQUIRE based on an internal desire to be academically challenged, the opportunity to participate in a program that would allow them to take steps towards reaching their future goals, and the chance to work with other gifted students. One student summed up her decision to attend by saying, "The decision to attend INQUIRE made sense. Everything I heard about the program sounded good... To ignore the advantages, would have been unwise."

Research Question Two

Whom or What Influenced the Students' Decision to Attend INQUIRE Academy?

It was anticipated that results of the study would show that students would decide to attend INQUIRE based upon their friends' decision to attend as well, especially since INQUIRE was to be housed at JLMS which served a high level of students from low SES homes and had a negative reputation in the community; however, this was not the case. Results showed the students became excited about INQUIRE upon learning about the academic opportunities that would be available for them, in addition to taking classes with other gifted students. The data the students gathered at the informational sessions influenced their decision more than any other factor. Remaining in school with friends was shown to be a lower priority for these students than participating in a challenging

educational environment. One student said, “Decisions of where my friends were going did not play a part in my decision. I was going to take advantage of this opportunity even if none of my friends did.” This surprising result should have a great impact on the advertising and promotion of INQUIRE in the future. Faculty and staff should take this information into serious advisement when planning for future informational sessions.

Research Question Three

What Were the Student’s Expectations for Their Experience at INQUIRE Academy?

The expectations and visions of INQUIRE were the same for the majority of the participants. Their thoughts seemed to echo each other repeatedly. They anticipated:

- The opportunity to get ahead or get out of school faster.
- Exciting classes.
- The opportunity to learn new material.
- Challenging classes that were not always easy.
- Lots of exams.
- Supportive teachers who understood gifted students.
- Classes made up of only gifted students.
- Courses to help them reach their goals.
- Laptops to take home.
- Classes made up of responsible and mature learners.

INQUIRE Applications: Student Responses

Entrance applications for INQUIRE Academy were mailed to all students who had previously been identified as gifted or high achieving by district standards. This application posed three questions for each student to answer. Students were automatically accepted into the program once their identification as a gifted or high achieving student was verified. Several students were denied entrance into INQUIRE, because they had not been identified and had somehow gotten a copy of the application. The application questions and student answers are summarized in Appendix B for the 129 students who completed the year at INQUIRE. It is interesting that the same thoughts and ideas expressed by the six participants of this study were echoed by the other 123 students who chose to attend INQUIRE. These students wanted to be challenged in fun and interesting ways, to be able to work at their own level and pace, and to be with other students who learned and thought like they did, so they could be successful in high school and college. Obviously, the creation of INQUIRE was answering a strong need felt among gifted and high achieving students of BISD.

Conclusions

The results of this study support the research of current gifted educators on asynchronous development, characteristics and needs of gifted students, and programming of gifted services. The participants' descriptions of personal behaviors, characteristics and experiences validate and confirm the findings of previous investigations. The theory of asynchronous development is the first research finding

supported by this project. The research shows that evidence of asynchronous development places the gifted outside normal developmental patterns from birth into adulthood (Kearney, 2000; Morelock, 1992). “If development is perceived as a life-long process, giftedness can then be understood as producing atypical development throughout the lifespan in terms of awareness, perceptions, emotional responses, and life experiences. This places the gifted individual developmentally out of sync both internally, in relation to the different aspects of development, and externally, in relation to cultural expectations” (Morelock, 1992, pg. 15). Asynchrony has been shown to increase as IQ increases due to the greater distance between the mental and chronological ages, which can create social and emotional adjustment issues leading to higher stress levels for the students (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Morelock, 1992; Silverman, 2002). “Asynchrony also involves uneven development and feeling out of step with societal norms. All of these factors create social and emotional vulnerabilities and require differentiated parenting, teaching, and counseling to promote optimal development in gifted individuals” (Silverman, 2002, pg. 32). Three participants in this study exhibited visible characteristics of asynchronous development. Jenny, Elliott, and Thomas were aware and verbalized that they did not fit in with their peers, but they did not understand why others did not like them. Jenny purposefully strove to be different in the way she dressed. In the past she has come to school wearing colored knee socks with high top tennis shoes and shorts, pink tutus, blue hair, red hair, a shaved head, and a Mohawk. She has multiple ear piercings and wears brightly colored clothes and jewelry. She does not care to conform to cultural expectations for her appearance. For this, in

elementary school, she was often ostracized and isolated by her age peers. At INQUIRE surrounded by her intellectual peers, she was accepted for her differences and made many friends. Elliott, who physically appears to be at least two years older than his age peers, is extremely intelligent. He had not made many friends at his former school, where he had only attended one year before coming to INQUIRE. Based on his interactions with his age peers in sixth grade, he did not feel he could open up to them and let them see who he really was. He did not feel they would understand his thoughts and emotions. It was obvious to him that he thought and acted differently than other sixth graders. He felt lonely and desired to find people who thought and felt like he did. Even after coming to INQUIRE where he was with intellectual peers, he still had difficulty making friends, because, his expectations for others was so high. He was unable to lower or adjust his expectations and found no one could successfully be what he wanted them to be. Because his intellectual ability was so advanced, he needed to be around even older students than INQUIRE provided to be able to find the intellectual peers who would truly understand him. Elliott also showed high levels of anxiety in many situations, had high expectations for peer behavior, and easily got upset or frustrated when things did not go his way. According to his mother, he has always been a highly anxious child and the family works with him constantly to help him be able to deal with situations. Thomas, who is short in stature and appears almost two years younger than his age peers, came from a school where he had many friends, but has encountered difficulty making new friends at INQUIRE. Students and teachers often describe his behavior as immature and silly. While he feels he is being funny so the

other students will laugh, the other students find him annoying and irritating. At other times, his depression can lead to emotional meltdowns, which include anger and tears, ending in his refusal to participate in class activities. These behaviors cause students avoid him, which leads to his sadness over not making many friends his first year at INQUIRE. He felt he was being true to himself and showing the others who he was, but the students did not understand him. Both Elliott and Thomas have spent many hours in the school counselor's office trying to cope with their highly charged emotions. Their parents also worked with them to help them be able to cope with situation easier. These three students showed visible characteristics of asynchronous development when compared to other gifted students. The remaining three participants did not stand out when compared to other gifted students, but they did at their previous schools when compared to their age peers. Not only are the signs of asynchronous development visible to others, but the students themselves can verbalize the internal struggles that they endure in not fitting into societal norms.

The second research finding supported by this project confirms that gifted students are aware of their abilities and skills, and desire to receive an education that will help them to grow and develop those abilities. Previous studies have shown that gifted students have obvious cognitive and affective differences when compared to non-gifted students. These differences often develop at an earlier age than is typical of their same age peers (Winner, 1997). Cognitive differences in gifted students can include the ability to manipulate abstract symbol systems, the power of concentration, a well-developed memory, early language development, curiosity, a preference for independent

work, multiple interests, and the ability to generate original ideas. Other cognitive differences include the ability to grasp information more quickly, the need for fewer repetitions to gain mastery, the knowledge of content several grade levels above their age peers, active problem solvers, and the ability to multi-task (Caraisco, 2007; Johnsen, 2004; Reis & Small, 2007; Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, 1998a; Winner, 1997). Affective characteristics of gifted students can include a sense of justice, altruism and idealism, a sense of humor, emotional intensity, perfectionism, high levels of energy, strong attachments and commitments, and aesthetic sensitivity. Other affective differences include enjoying time by themselves, introversion, independence, non-conformity, persistence, passion about areas of interest, preference for older friends, becoming bored with routine tasks, having a higher self-esteem in regards to intellectual ability, and being intrinsically motivated (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Johnsen, 2004; Reis & Small, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 1998a; Winner, 1997). The participants in this study described themselves as having many of these cognitive and affective characteristics during the interviews. They were aware of their individual abilities and desired to have the opportunities to develop these skills to their fullest potential. Often the brightest children in the schools are the ones that are learning the least and making the smallest gains in achievement. They are often just going through the motions of learning and are not actually engaged with the teacher. Instruction must be motivating and delivered at an appropriately challenging level, so gifted students do not become apathetic, angry, depressed, or engage in disruptive classroom behaviors (Caraisco, 2007; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Winner, 1997). “The relationship between

interest and motivation is crucial for talented youngsters who often spend hours, days, weeks, or years deeply involved in what absorbs them. Indeed, that sustained interest over time is an essential factor in giftedness and talent development in young people” (Caraisco, 2007, pg. 257). Educators need to have a thorough understanding of how gifted students learn in order to successfully meet their needs in the classroom.

Otherwise, inappropriate programming, where instruction does not match the student’s needs, will produce less than desired intellectual development. The motivation to find an interesting and challenging academic environment was the reason all six of the participants involved in this study chose to attend INQUIRE. They repeatedly echoed the thought of needing an academic challenge that allowed them to grow as individuals. Their thoughts were supported by the INQUIRE students who did not participate in this study but time after time said on their INQUIRE applications:

- They did not feel they were being challenged in their classes at their old schools.
- They wanted to learn new material and study the content more deeply.
- They wanted learning to be fun, interesting, and faster paced.
- They wanted teachers who understood how they thought and how they learned.
- They wanted to push themselves to be better students.
- They wanted to be better prepared for high school and college.
- They wanted to achieve their goals.

These students were willing to leave familiar environments, friends, and teammates to participate in a new school that would provide them with the necessary elements they felt they were missing in their education. The fact that the new school was located on a

highly at-risk campus with a bad reputation for academics and student behavior did not deter them in seeking the opportunity to learn. They wanted a chance to be challenged in their academics and abilities, to excel in advanced levels of content, and to gain an advantage on their future.

The third research finding supported by this project involves multiple programming options for the delivery of gifted services. This study shows gifted students desire to be clustered in learning environments with other gifted students that allow for academic advancement based upon their individual abilities and needs. Prior studies have shown that ability grouping, also known as clustering or homogeneous grouping, is extremely flexible and can take several forms within schools. It may include the creation of a self-contained class for gifted students. It could mean grouping high ability students together within a classroom, even across multiple ages, for specific subjects, or it could mean placing children into schools designed especially for gifted students. The clustering of gifted students together on a full-time basis provides them multiple opportunities throughout the day to be intellectually challenged and stimulated (Benbow, 1998b; Feldhusen, 1998b; Gross, 2008; Hunt & Seney, 2001; Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000; Schroth, 2008; Winner, 1997). Winner's (1997) meta-analyses of evaluations of self-contained classes for gifted students showed that "The typical gain for gifted students in accelerated, ability-grouped classes was almost one year more on standardized tests than gains made by equivalent-ability students in heterogeneous classrooms" and "The typical gain for gifted students in enriched, ability-grouped classes was about four to five months greater than gains by matched students in

regular classrooms” (pg. 1076). Acceleration is another program intervention that allows students to advance based upon their individual abilities. Acceleration can be a fast-paced course, grade skipping, or early entrance to school. It can also be advancing a student several levels in a particular area of precociousness. Acceleration is possible and desirable in all areas of the curriculum, but should only be done in areas of student strength (Benbow 1998a; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Feldhusen 1998c; Gross, 2008; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Winner, 1997). Acceleration is not pushing students to advance or learn before they are ready. Students should be consulted regarding acceleration prior to determining whether acceleration is the right option for a particular student. Students are the ones who must make the social adjustments that go along with acceleration and their view on the matter is critical in order for this strategy to be successful. Students in favor of acceleration usually are able to make the transition with minor difficulty (Benbow 1998a; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 2005). Acceleration generally leads to desirable outcomes, including increased motivation to learn, and has been shown to be one of the most effective services for gifted students (Alsop, 2003; Benbow, 1998a; Feldhusen, 1998c; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 2005). Schools designed especially for gifted students are not as common as flexible grouping programs and acceleration options. It is rare to find public magnet schools at the elementary and middle school level, which target gifted students, but it is more common to find public magnet high schools for the gifted (VanTassel-Baska, 1998b; Winner, 1997). INQUIRE Academy was designed to offer something unusual in public education – the opportunity to cluster gifted students

together, to provide them the opportunity to be intellectually stimulated and challenged by working with peers of the same ability level, to offer multi-age classes, and to offer acceleration based upon student need. The 129 students who chose to attend INQUIRE recognized the opportunity being presented to them and the benefits they would receive from participating in this new school. Many parents have referred to INQUIRE as “The opportunity for a private school education in a public school setting.” Incoming students who desired to accelerate in specific subjects were offered the opportunity to take above-level tests during the summer. Results from these tests determined students who were ready to accelerate. Math and science curriculums were compacted to squeeze three years of content (6th-8th grade) into two years (6th-7th grade), so students would be ready to accelerate at the eighth grade level. Towards the end of seventh grade, students would take readiness tests for Algebra I and Biology I to determine whether they were ready to shift into high school classes. Those that passed the readiness tests at a certain level would then be enrolled in the high school courses. Those that showed they had not mastered the compacted curriculum would stay on level in math or science and would remediate and expand those content skills. For program evaluation purposes, INQUIRE students also participate in above-level testing by taking the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)* and/or *The Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED)* two years above their current grade level. Preliminary test results show that INQUIRE students are scoring as well as, or better, than students who are two years older. These results show that INQUIRE Academy is meeting the intellectual needs of gifted and high achieving

students better than other BISD schools, which do not cluster or provide acceleration opportunities.

Future Research Possibilities

This study lends itself to several future research possibilities. The first study would involve taking an in-depth look at the six students who began the year at INQUIRE, but chose to leave and return to their zoned campus. Three of those left within the first six weeks of school; one left after twelve weeks; one left at the end of the first semester, and one left during the fourth six weeks. Of the students who returned to their home campuses, four were female and two were male. Four were seventh graders who had begun middle school at RMS and two were sixth graders who would attend DMS, the new middle school. When questioned, none of the students or parents expressed unhappiness with INQUIRE and the opportunities being offered there. All expressed happiness with the classes and the teachers; rather, these six missed being with their former friends and felt a stronger need to be in school with them, than to pursue the opportunities offered at INQUIRE. It would be interesting to interview those students who left INQUIRE to see whether they were happy with their decision to return to be with their friends, or if they regretted their decision and the opportunities they missed by leaving INQUIRE. Further questions to consider would include:

- What was it about these students' personalities and characteristics that caused them to need the support of their friends?

- How were they different from the students who chose to stay and did not need the support of their friends?
- Would results from personality tests of students who stayed compared to students who left reveal a profile for a student who would be successful at INQUIRE?
- Would a personality test reveal those students who are risk-takers, goal-setters, and dream-chasers?
- Does this have more to do with personality or motivation?
- What does the research say regarding motivation and gifted students?
- Would a personality test provide helpful information in the selection of students who would be successful in the program?

It would be helpful to know these answers as the number of students who apply to INQUIRE in the future increases and a need arises to limit the students who are accepted into the program. Having such information could prove useful in selecting students who had the characteristics to stay with the program and benefit from its design.

A second research project to arise from this study would be an investigation into the development of a checklist or scale for use in identifying gifted students based upon signs of asynchronous development. Research has shown that identifying gifted students with qualitative methods is time consuming and educators prefer to use intelligence tests to capture a quick measure of student ability. In order to ease this time constraint, the possibility of creating a user-friendly checklist/scale based on visible cognitive, social, physical, and emotional characteristics for asynchronous development arises. Questions to consider for further study might include:

- Are there enough visible characteristics of asynchronous development that a teacher could use a checklist/scale to assist in the identification process?
- Can a student version be developed to provide insight into the internal thoughts related to feeling out-of-sync with ones' peers?
- If a checklist/scale could be developed, would it correlate with and show similar results as an intelligence test?
- If such a checklist/scale could be developed and proven to produce similar results as an intelligence test, would it make the identification process easier for schools?
- Would such a checklist/scale be useful for all gifted students or only those with exceedingly high intelligence?
- What knowledge and research would be needed to discover if this is a feasible project?

These are intriguing question that might be considered by someone motivated enough to tackle the challenge of developing such a checklist/scale. If such a user-friendly checklist/scale incorporating external and internal characteristics of asynchronous development that produced similar results to intelligence testing could be developed, there could potentially be a large market for this product.

A third area of future research possibilities would be the continued study of above level testing with gifted students. Gifted students taking on-grade level standardized tests usually hit the test ceiling and accurate results of the students' ability cannot be determined from an on-grade level test. In an effort to remove the test ceiling

and see how high gifted students can actually perform, this topic is currently being conducted at INQUIRE by a Texas A&M University graduate student who is assisting the INQUIRE staff with their program evaluation. Students were tested at the beginning of the school year with a test two grade-levels above their current grade. This test provides a baseline score. Students were then tested again in the spring with the same level of the test for a growth score. Students will continue to take *ITBS* or *ITED* each year at two years above-grade level to determine growth and student achievement. Preliminary results show this group of students are performing as well, if not better, than students who are two years older. The assisting graduate student has been in contact with the author of the *ITBS* and *ITED*, who is extremely interested in the results of this study. In addition, he has presented the results from this study at a national conference and plans to present more on this topic in the future as he continues to study the trends and patterns seen from these test results. Further questions to consider in this study might include:

- How many years above grade-level can a student test where the results can still be considered valid?
- Does above-level testing serve a purpose other than program evaluation?
- What impact would above-level testing have on the achievement and standardized testing market?
- Could above-level testing of students begin to play a larger role in the identification process of gifted students?

The continued study of above-level testing could potentially bring about some major changes in the identification process, as well as the use of standardized tests with gifted students.

It has been a remarkable experience to be involved in the development of the INQUIRE Academy in Bryan, Texas, and to watch the impact that is occurring in students' lives due to their participation in this unique and rare program. By being on the cutting edge of innovation in gifted education, the possibilities for positively impacting numerous student lives will multiply exponentially as word of this program spreads across the state, and other districts visit to learn how to develop similar programs. Thus, beginning a ripple effect, which can change the face of gifted education forever.

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APPENDIX A

PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

The protocol questions used in this study were:

1. Tell me how you first heard about INQUIRE Academy. What were some of your first thoughts about INQUIRE?
2. How did you envision this program? What did you expect it would be like?
3. Let's talk about how you made your decision to come. Who did you talk to? What information did you gather? How did you go about deciding this program was for you?
4. When your friends heard you were coming to INQUIRE, how did they react? How did their reaction play into your decision? Did any of your friends also decide to come to INQUIRE? If your friends had decided not to come, would it have changed your decision?
5. Now that you have been here for a year, did the program meet your expectations? Was it what you thought it would be?

APPENDIX B

INQUIRE APPLICATION QUESTIONS AND STUDENT REPOSSES

1. Why do you wish to attend INQUIRE?

- “It will be more challenging, which is what I need.”
- “I will gain a better education than my current classes”.
- “School is boring. This will be fun and interesting.”
- “Students will be better behaved here.”
- “The program will be more individualized.”
- “I will be with other students who have a similar intellectual ability.”
- “I will be able to focus on learning.”
- “I can earn high school credits while in middle school.”
- “I am excited about learning.”
- “Some of my friends are applying.”
- “It will help me embrace my future.”
- “My parents want me to attend.”
- “The teachers will understand how to teach gifted students because they are gifted too.”
- “I am smart and intelligent.”
- “I want to push myself to be the best I can be.”

2. *What do you hope to gain from attending INQUIRE?*

- “To acquire more knowledge and skills in new areas.”
- “To make new friends.”
- “To be better prepared for high school and college.”
- “To learn at my own level and rate.”
- “To feel challenged.”
- “To become a better student.”
- “To have fun while learning.”
- “To become a great leader.”
- “To get ahead in school.”
- “To make a difference.”
- “To learn to speak better in front of an audience.”
- “To find people who think like me.”
- “To gain more knowledge of the world around me.”
- “To gain independence so I can do more on my own.”
- “To learn to face all kinds of challenges that will come my way.”
- “To have an opportunity to work alongside my intellectual peers.”
- “To help me achieve my goals.”
- “To gain a wealth of knowledge that surpasses most students at my age level.”

3. *How do you think INQUIRE will be different from your current school?*

- “There will be less fighting, yelling, and disruptive students.”
- “There will be better science equipment.”

- “The curriculum will be advanced, more difficult, and faster paced.”
- “There will be more variety in subjects.”
- “Classes will be smaller.”
- “There will be more choices.”
- “It will bring out my creativity.”
- “The teachers will understand me and will keep me busy.”
- “There will be more depth to the subjects.”
- “I will be in class with students that want to learn and who are more like me.”
- “It will be more fun.”
- “It will allow me to express myself.”
- “It will allow me to encourage my dreams.”
- “I will learn new things.”
- “I won’t be picked on for my weird ideas.”
- “I will have to work harder in my studies.”
- “There will be more hands-on activities.”
- “I will be able to finish school faster.”
- “I will not have to wait for everyone to finish their work before we move on to something new.”
- “We will use technology.”
- “We will be able to follow through with ideas that come up in discussions.”

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